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ABSTRACT

After-school programs provide an important educational setting for an increasing number of children and have been viewed as a way to help solve school problems, reduce drug use, and prevent violence and youth crime. This toolkit is designed to help school-based after-school program staff plan and make decisions in six critical areas: (1) management; (2) collaboration; (3) programming; (4) integration with the traditional school day; (5) evaluation; and (6) communication. The toolkit discusses key decision points, offers criteria for decision making, suggests effective strategies, and provides a set of tools to assist in the decision-making process. Some of the tools help with data gathering, some create formats for analyzing information, others help to structure dialogue around important issues, and still others assist with information sharing. (KB)

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A Toolkit for Creating Effective After-School Programs

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A Toolkit for Creating Effective After-School Programs

By Katie E. Walter, Public Impact, and
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Throughout this toolkit we refer to "after-school programs." We selected this term to reflect our focus on school-based programs. However, this term also includes before-school, summer, and extended-day programs and community learning centers. We use the term "program coordinator" to indicate the person who is responsible for the day-to-day management and operations of an after-school program. In many programs, this person may be called the director, site manager, program leader, or some other title.

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INTRODUCTION

After-school programs provide an important educational setting for an increasing number of children. At a time when more and more young people are spending the hours between 2 and 6 p.m. unsupervised, the need for high-quality programs is great. Moreover, after-school programs are viewed as a way to help solve school problems, reduce drug use, and prevent violence and youth crime. As a result, recent interest and financial support for school-based after-school programs has come from both the public and private sector.

This dramatic infusion of attention on the after-school hours raises questions for staff managing and working in these programs about how best to offer high-quality programs. We know that strong programs are the result of careful planning and a strong vision. Yet all too often, decisions are made quickly and without adequate information. **Beyond the Bell: A Toolkit for Creating Effective After-School Programs** helps after-school program staff plan and make good decisions in six critical areas: management, collaboration, programming, integration with the traditional school day, evaluation, and communication. The toolkit discusses key decision points, offers criteria for decision making, suggests effective strategies, and provides a set of tools to assist in the decision-making process. Some of the tools help with data gathering, some create formats for analyzing information, others help to structure dialogue around important issues, and others assist with information sharing.

Strong programs do not grow from good intentions and luck. They are the result of hard work, clear focus, strong leadership, careful analysis of the needs of participants, and effectual decision making around key issues. Creating a strong after-school program involves continuous improvement that is based on constantly reviewing the unique needs, assets, challenges, goals, and vision of each program. There is no one right model for all after-school programs. Rather, each program should be designed to address the needs of its students and community members. Likewise, there is no one best use of this toolkit. Program coordinators should use the ideas and the tools if and how they best fit the needs and the timeline of their program—whether it is to revamp an entire set of policies, work through a specific problem, or simply to create greater community awareness of the program with a press release or other outreach effort.

Some key concepts form the basis of this document and should guide the decisions of all programs:

- **Think strategically.** The vision for the future of the program should shape every decision in the present.
- **Think inclusively.** The program belongs to the community. Therefore, members of the community should have a voice in, and responsibility for, its operations.

Strong programs do not grow from good intentions and luck. They are the result of hard work, clear focus, strong leadership, careful analysis of the needs of participants, and effectual decision making around key issues.

- **Think collaboratively.** Programs should reflect the interdependence of a community through the sharing of ideas, mission, and resources. Coordinators can foster this interaction by considering partnership with those who offer it, seeking partnership with those who might offer it, and eliciting partnership from those who should offer it.

After-school programs offer great hope for students and communities and significant challenges for those charged with operating them. Coordinators will face programmatic, governance, budgetary, and "political" questions that have no easy answers. Though this document does not provide the answers, it does provide guidance to help coordinators leverage their abilities and insights to make the best decisions possible. **Beyond the Bell** is a resource that programs can use to promote and support student learning and success.

MANAGEMENT

Participation from everyone who has a role to play in your after-school program can help you make well-thought-out decisions about which needs the program can fill.

Once an after-school program has received the money and permission to begin operations, the process of making the program work—How do we actually *do* this?—takes immediate priority. Quality management, or making good decisions about how things are done, can keep your goals and vision in focus while also dealing with the nuts and bolts of getting kids in the door safely, hiring and retaining quality staff, and making the most of your facilities and the activities offered. This chapter will help you focus on the issues and decisions you will face in making your program work. Along the way, the theme of keeping your program going (sustainability) will be highlighted to make sure that the work you are doing will continue beyond this funding cycle, grant award, or fiscal year budget.

This chapter looks at the following decision points:

- **How can you best organize management of the program?**
- **How can you effectively manage resources?**
- **How can you staff your program to attract and keep able personnel?**

Before going on to the nuts and bolts of management, however, you must determine your program's vision and goals. Chances are you already have done some significant work deciding what the focus of the program's operation should be. Some programs focus on academic achievement, others on community safety. Some try to create a balance between recreation and study. Knowing what your focus is can help you allocate your resources, hire staff, and decide on programming. When determining your vision and goals, it is important to include everyone who has a role to play in the center: parents, student representatives, volunteers, staff members, school faculty and administrators, and community organizations. Participation from each of these groups can help you make well-thought-out decisions about which needs can be filled by the program. If you have not included these folks in developing your vision, you can always go back and do so now; there is no statute of limitations on creating a vision.

A common question is, Can you really make a distinction between a program's vision and goals? A vision is an ideal picture of what the program will look like; the goals are the pieces you have to put into place or actions you have to take to achieve that vision. Goals should be achievable, short-term items that are measurable in some concrete way. Thinking about your program's vision and goals early and often is critical to sustaining it for the long haul.

Tool 1, Visioning Worksheet, and **Tool 2, Goal Setting Worksheet,** will help you record the long-term vision for your after-school program and the steps you must take to make this vision a reality.

How Can You Best Organize Management of the Program?

A critical component in determining and reaching an after-school program's vision is having a strong and supportive management structure behind it. Your program already may have a management system in place. But if this system is not working, you may want to think about the decisions that are necessary to put a more appropriate management structure in place. A successful after-school program needs to have hands-on, site-based management with regular oversight and accountability to all partners.

That said, there is no one "right" management structure for your program. In fact, you can select from a range of successful management designs that operate along a continuum, from a centralized decision-making structure (with the program coordinator or another individual as the primary decision maker) to a group-focused decision-making structure (with an advisory governance group made up of several different components).

Continuum of Decision Making	
Centralized Decision Making ⟵	⟶ **Group Decision Making**
Advantages • Decisions are made quickly as problems arise. • It is relatively easy to mobilize resources. • The authority mandate is clear.	*Advantages* • There is a built-in support structure whenever decisions are made. • Different perspectives contribute to the decision. • Creative solutions are more likely to be found by a group.
Disadvantages • There is no "sounding board" to forestall poorer choices. • It opens the door to second-guessing by those who did not participate in making the decision. • The success of the decision can depend on the strength of the decision maker. When the decision maker leaves, it can be difficult to sustain the decision.	*Disadvantages* • Decisions take longer to be made. • The members of the group may have conflicting agendas, motives, or personalities. • Program staff may have less of a voice in decisions that affect program operations.

Wherever your program's current management structure falls along this continuum, it is important to take a step back and reflect on how well the structure is working. If it could be working better, it is time to make some changes.

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Establishing Operating Procedures

One role of an after-school program's management is to set operating procedures. But having too many rules can hinder a program's work. Programs need to establish a balance between creating procedures that allow them to run smoothly and giving staff members the flexibility to make judgments in light of particular circumstances. The best balance will depend on the individual characteristics of each program and will vary from issue to issue within the program. For example, some programs may be bound by all the policies of the school district, while others may have more flexibility.

Why is it important to establish procedures? Establishing a procedure means that a program believes a situation or issue is important enough that staff should have specific guidelines for dealing with it. For example, you may never have to deal with an inebriated parent picking up a child. But if you do and your program has a policy to address this situation, your staff will know how to deal with this parent.

The box at the right lists some areas in which you may want to consider establishing operating procedures. See **Tool 3, "Do We Need a Procedure?" Checklist,** for a checklist to help you determine whether you should establish an operating procedure.

Once you have set your procedures, how are you going to let your staff and governing body know about them? Here are some suggestions:

- Create a procedures handbook and give a copy to all staff members and volunteers.
- Share a copy of the procedures with all staff at a staff meeting.
- Post the procedures on a central bulletin board.

Keep in mind that new staff members need training on operating procedures. It also is important to keep existing staff up to date on changes to procedures.

How Can You Effectively Manage Resources?

Financial concerns are a priority for many programs as they work toward sustainability. Because most grants fund only a few years of operation, programs cannot rely on them for the long term. Thus, it is important to develop a long-term resource plan. After-school programs can be supported totally by participant fees, they may depend solely on grants, or they may rely on some combination of these funding sources. As you develop your program's resource plan, remember that reliance on fee-based revenue raises many issues about students' ability to participate in your program. What is right for your program depends on a thorough examination of your program, your community, and the amount of energy you can invest in the process.

If your program has been operating well for even a short period of time, you should look for other resources in your community that can be reallocated to your

Potential Areas for Operating Procedures*

- Financial controls (handling of incoming funds, expenditures, etc.)
- Confidentiality of student records
- Transportation times/methods
- Field trips
- Discipline procedures
- Accidents
- Storm preparedness
- Emergency evacuation
- Violent intruders
- Inebriated parents picking up their children
- Suspected child abuse
- Student drug possession
- Student weapon possession
- Staff/volunteer qualifications
- Staff/volunteer background checks
- Staff/volunteer training
- Staff/volunteer drug possession
- Staff/volunteer evaluations
- Unsatisfactory staff/volunteers
- Staff/volunteer termination

**Program coordinators should speak with law enforcement personnel, attorneys, and school district officials (if applicable) to help determine potential areas for operating procedures.*

From the Field: Fundraising

A program in the small town of Port Clinton, Ohio, started a resource drive that brought together the whole community. First, staff members took the time to inventory the program's resource needs, which they then asked the local newspaper to advertise. The program also asked a local business to volunteer its storefront window to display all the donations. Individuals and businesses from all over town contributed to the growing pile of items displayed in the window. The program further encouraged donations by publicly recognizing everyone who donated, no matter how little the item. Even though the program no longer advertises its needs in the paper, staff members report they still receive donations on a regular basis.

program. For example, if you can show that your program has had an effect on learning within your school district, you may be able to ask the district to apportion part of its Title I funding to the program to ensure its survival. Also, you may be able to create partnerships with community agencies whose missions are aligned with your program's (e.g., YMCA, YWCA, Boys' and Girls' Clubs, faith groups, the United Way) and provide services in exchange for a portion of dedicated funding.

When determining what, if any, fees to charge participants, you may want to consider the following questions:

- Are community members able to pay?
- What third-party reimbursements (e.g., from social service agencies) are available for eligible participants?
- What effect will fees have on the number and type of participants?
- What are the requirements of using a "sliding-scale" fee schedule?
- Is it financially feasible and acceptable to families to perform part-time work for the program in exchange for services?
- Can some of the after-school budget be supplemented by the school district?

When considering what grants to apply for, you may want to consider these questions:

- What effect will the grant have on the program's mission (e.g., a new emphasis on violence prevention)?
- What effect will the grant have on the participant population (e.g., focusing on students with reading difficulties)?
- What is the duration of the grant?
- Can the grant be renewed?
- What bureaucratic requirements accompany the grant?

To answer these questions you must survey the community to discover its ability and willingness to pay and do research on grants and third-party payments. Balancing these concerns requires a conscious effort to remain focused on the mission of the program without jeopardizing its financial sustainability. At times, this task may seem difficult. You may have to reassess what activities are instrumental to fulfilling the program's mission. You may have to try out new funding structures that do not please everyone. But keep in mind that painful, short-term decisions that allow an after-school program to remain in operation also allow it to revise its offerings and payment structures when it is in a better position to do so in the future.

Finding Resources

Finding resources is a key concern of any organization. Three key questions can help focus your search:

- What resources are out there?
- Is there another program you could partner with in order to share or apply for resources?
- Can other resources in your community (e.g., school district, other community agencies, state/federal welfare dollars) be reallocated to your after-school program?

While there are many effective strategies for locating resources, two suggestions may turn up unexpected sources: do your research and think outside the box.

Doing Your Research

Many different organizations offer grants and assistance to youth-serving organizations. Taking the time to do the research can make a big difference in a programs's available resources. See **Tool 4, Resources for Funding Information,** for a list of suggestions on where to begin your research.

Thinking "Outside the Box"

In addition to researching known resource providers, you should consider less-traditional ways of finding resources. Consider the following questions:

- What government agencies provide funds for organizations that pursue goals or activities (e.g., drug or violence prevention) that are consistent with those of your program?
- Can you share resources with any other local programs (e.g., a church that only uses its van during the evenings or on weekends)?
- Are any local businesses willing to make in-kind donations (e.g., old computers, scrap paper, food)?
- Would any local organizations like to rent space in your building (e.g., volunteer fire personnel training sessions, small businesses in need of conference space)?
- Can program participants provide any services for a fee to local organizations and/or community members (e.g., Web page design, arts and crafts products)?

Managing Your Budget

Regardless of how your program is funded, you still need to manage the budget effectively. However, budgeting does not need to be overcomplicated. You can look at it as tracking your income in order to plan your programming for the year and to allocate your resources. Use **Tool 5, Budget Worksheet,** to help manage your budget.

Potential Staff Members

- College students
- Community residents
- District paraprofessionals (e.g., reading specialists, computer lab aides, teaching assistants)
- Parents
- School district substitutes
- Senior citizens
- Staff of community agencies
- Teachers

How Can You Staff Your Program to Attract and Keep Able Personnel?

Many program coordinators report that a good staff is an important—if not *the* most important—component of an effective program. Therefore, much care should be taken in selecting and training staff. Many coordinators soon realize, however, that it can be difficult to attract and keep the right people because programs often lack the resources to offer competitive salaries or ample training. There is no easy solution to this dilemma. But there are some strategies that can help. This section discusses ways to find and keep the best staff and offers suggestions for finding alternatives to high wages as a way of investing in staff.

Establishing Criteria for Staff Selection and Writing a Comprehensive Job Description

Each program looks for different qualifications for its staff. Some programs weigh an academic degree and the amount of teaching experience most heavily in hiring decisions. Others look for personal characteristics (such as passion and commitment) and provide any additional training that an applicant needs. The balance among education, experience, and personality will depend on your program's offerings, circumstances, and preferences.

After deciding on hiring criteria, you should create a job description that describes the qualifications for the position, the duties and benefits of the position, and the expectations of the program. Writing a good job description will help your program draw the type of candidates you hope to hire. Use **Tool 1, Visioning Worksheet,** to help determine your program's staffing needs.

Providing Training That Meets the Needs of the Program and the Schedules of the Staff

The benefits of a better-trained staff are fairly clear: improved outcomes for program participants, more marketable skills for program personnel, and potentially more sustainability for the program itself. The obstacles to providing training also are fairly evident: lack of resources, lack of time, lack of available and effective training, and loss of staff with more marketable skills to higher paying jobs.

First, you must determine what training to offer or encourage. The types of training will vary depending on the offerings and circumstances of each program. As your program explores different types of training, consider the following questions:

- What training is required by an organizational authority (e.g., school district, licensing agency)?
- What staff skills would contribute to a safer after-school environment?
- What staff skills would contribute to a more effective program?

- What training has been requested by staff members?
- What training has been suggested by other stakeholders?
- What "in-house" expertise is possessed by staff members that could be shared with other staff members?
- What external training is available, accessible, and known to be effective?

See the box at the right for some training topics you may want to consider.

Overcoming Obstacles to Providing Staff Training

As described above, after-school programs face several obstacles to providing training for staff: lack of resources, lack of time, and lack of available and effective training. The following are suggestions to help your program overcome these obstacles:

- Contact community colleges to find scholarships for staff who want to take relevant classes. Some programs have found that a good deal of untapped money is available at community colleges.
- Supplement financial reimbursement for classes with other incentives, such as greater autonomy in a job, increased chances for promotion, in-kind donations* (e.g., offer donated computers for home use), public recognition, etc.
- Partner with other after-school programs to reduce the per-person cost of training.
- Rigorously focus limited resources on the highest priority development opportunities—those that appear essential to meeting the program's goals.
- Ask staff members to share (for modest reimbursement) their particular skills with other staff members at "in-house" training sessions.
- Be flexible when scheduling staff development time. Some staff members have other jobs or commitments, which may make it difficult to find a time for training that fits everyone's schedules. Some programs work around this problem by holding training on the weekends or closing occasionally to provide training for staff members.
- Ensure that staff members are learning on the job by deliberately trying new strategies and working on developmental challenges.
- Join with other programs and/or schools to lobby providers of training (e.g., school districts, nonprofit organizations, universities) for more, different, or better-quality training. Supply often follows demand even in the public sphere—if the demand is organized and vocal.
- Have staff evaluate each training opportunity and keep a record of these evaluations. This strategy will help other staff know which trainings to attend and which ones to avoid in the future.

*Make sure the program has permission from donors to use donations in this manner.

Training Topics

- First aid
- Recognizing child abuse
- Recognizing drug abuse
- Adolescent development
- Health and nutrition
- Conflict resolution
- Classroom management
- Working with special-needs students
- Multicultural awareness
- Avoiding gender bias
- Computer skills
- Designing engaging activities
- Change leadership
- Budgeting
- Data collection
- Program evaluation

Invest in Your Staff

- Set high expectations for staff and treat them as professionals.
- Provide training for staff to increase their marketable skills.
- Increase the autonomy and/or responsibility of staff members as they gain experience.
- Publicly recognize staff members with newsletter articles, "employee of the month" awards, banquets, etc.
- Celebrate birthdays and holidays.
- Provide creature comforts for use at the program site (e.g., coffeemakers, pagers, carts for moving supplies of "traveling" instructors, e-mail accounts).
- Spend time asking for input, offering praise for a job well done, and simply listening.

Providing Wages, Incentives, and Appreciation

Retaining staff requires an investment in personnel that demonstrates they are valued by the program. Clearly, wage/salary rates are an important form of investment, but many programs cannot pay staff members what they feel the staff deserves. Although it is important to try to offer enough money to attract and retain qualified staff, other forms of investment can show the staff they are appreciated. See the box at the left for suggestions on "investing" in staff.

While it may be impossible to hold onto staff members when they are offered a significant increase in pay elsewhere, a program can decrease the gap between a modest pay increase by offering intangible benefits. People may stay in low-paying jobs if they feel what they do is worthwhile, if they can see a visible impact, and if they feel appreciated by their organization and the people they help.

Conclusion

Effective management turns ideas into reality. Maintaining a constant focus on good decision making facilitates good management. But there is no such thing as stress-free management. To guide a program through its daily operations, you must balance and weigh numerous considerations and pressures. Nevertheless, if you think strategically, examine all options, and solicit input from others, you greatly increase your program's chances of remaining on the path toward a sustainable future.

Key Points to Remember

- "Sustainability" requires a daily dedication to the program's vision and long-term goals.
- All program partners need to be involved in periodically reviewing the program's vision and progress toward achieving that vision.
- Strong leadership is fundamental to sustaining an after-school program.
- Finding and retaining good staff require a willingness to invest in the right people. Establish concrete expectations, provide training, and demonstrate your appreciation for staff members.

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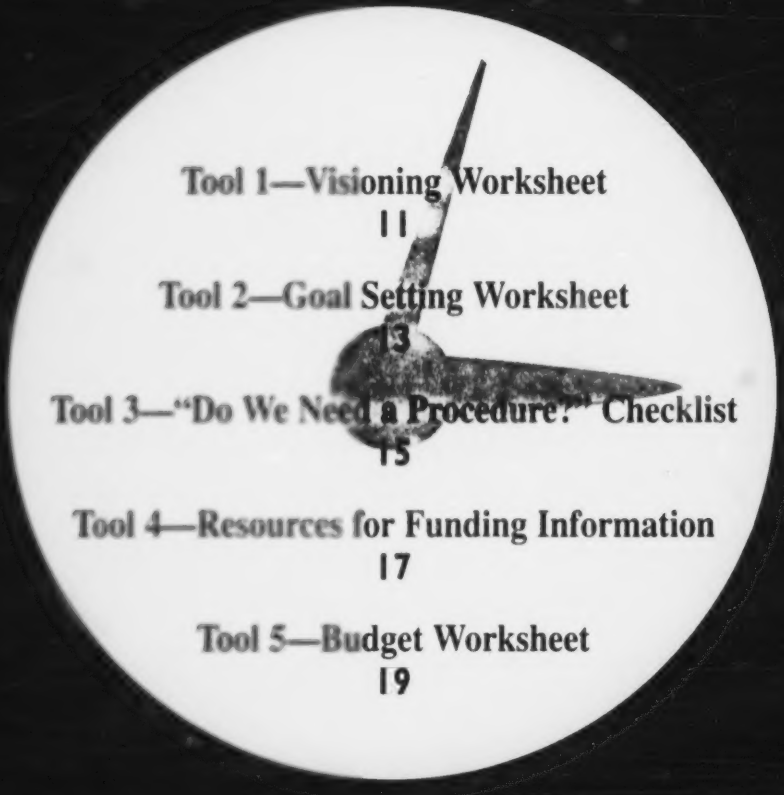
MANAGEMENT TOOLS



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Tool 3—"Do We Need a Procedure?" Checklist
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Tool 1—Visioning Worksheet

Directions: This worksheet can be used by programs that want to create an overall vision. Your vision should drive the daily operation of your program. Remember, when developing a vision, it is important to include parents, student representatives, volunteers, staff members, school faculty and administrators, and community organizations. Once you have established your vision, be sure to post it prominently to remind everyone what you are about.

The Five-Step Visioning Process

Step 1: Visioning—What is our vision of where the program will be in X years?

Step 2: Identifying challenges—What are the challenges or barriers to achieving this vision?

Step 3: Prioritizing the challenges—Of these challenges, which are the five most important? (Determine the top challenges by voting rather than discussion.)

Step 4: Identifying needs and assets—What needs will affect our ability to address these challenges? What resources or assets are available to help address these challenges?

Step 5: Strategizing—Given our needs and assets, what strategies could we use to address the challenges? (Brainstorm strategies as a group.)

This tool is based on material from National Center for Community Education. (1999). *21st CCLC Visioning: The Planning Process Workbook.* [Online]. Available: www.nccenet.org

Tool 1—Visioning Worksheet (continued)

Our vision for_____ (program name) over the next _____ years.

Date: _____

Participants

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Vision Statement

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Challenges (Prioritize)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Needs

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Assets

_____

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_____

_____

_____

Strategies for Meeting Challenges

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Tool 2—Goal Setting Worksheet

Directions: This worksheet can be used to record both long-term and intermediate goals. First, write down your vision statement. Next, think about the areas in which you want to set goals. Record these in the first column. We have provided a few examples to get you started. Then, in the middle column, record your specific goals for each area. Finally, determine a target date for achieving each goal.

Vision Statement

_____

_____

_____

_____

Area for Goals	Specific Goals	Target Date
Programming		
Fundraising		
Student Outcomes		
Community Participation		

This tool is based on material from National Center for Community Education. (1999). *21st CCLC Visioning: The Planning Process Workbook.* [Online]. Available: www.nccenet.org

Tool 2—Goal Setting Worksheet (continued)

Area for Goals	Specific Goals	Target Date

Tool 3—"Do We Need a Procedure?" Checklist

Directions: Well-considered procedures can help smooth the daily operations of an after-school program. However, if a program has too many rules, it can hinder and frustrate the staff. To determine whether you should establish a specific procedure or leave your staff with more flexibility, use the checklist below. First, describe the policy or issue in question in the space indicated. Then, place a check mark next to each question for which you answer "yes." When you are finished, tally your check marks. If you have four or more check marks (particularly if it is a legal liability question), you may want to consider establishing a policy.

Policy/Issue: _____

- ❑ Is it a matter that will directly affect the health and safety of participants and/or staff?
- ❑ Is it a situation that occurs on a regular basis?
- ❑ Is the way in which staff carries out the work in this area as important as the outcome of that work?
- ❑ Would law enforcement officials or attorneys suggest that it should be a policy?
- ❑ Could flexibility on this matter lead to inconsistent or conflicting practices?
- ❑ Is your staff relatively inexperienced in this area?
- ❑ Does your staff have difficulty taking initiative or responsibility without direction?
- ❑ Is this a matter that could result in liability for your program?

Total Score: _____

TOOL 4—RESOURCES FOR FUNDING INFORMATION

Books

Belcher, J. C. (1992). *From idea to funded project: Grant proposals that work.* Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press.

Cantarella, G. (Ed.). (1999). *National guide to funding for children, youth, and families* [5th edition]. New York: The Foundation Center.

Klein, K. (1996). *Fundraising for social change* [3rd edition]. San Francisco: Chardon Press.

R. R. Bowker. (2000). *Annual register of grant support, 2000: A directory of funding sources* [33rd edition]. New Providence, RI: Author.

Journals

Children and Youth Funding Report

Chronicle of Philanthropy

Corporate Giving Watch

Foundation Grants Alert

Organizations

The Foundation Center
79 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10003
(800) 424-9836
www.fdncenter.org

U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20202-0498
(800) USA-LEARN
www.ed.gov

U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20530-0001
www.usdoj.gov

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201
(202) 619-0257 or (877) 696-6775
www.hhs.gov

U.S. Department of Agriculture
14th and Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250
(202) 720-2791
www.usda.gov

Web Sites

Got School Fundraising
www.gotfundraising.com

21st Century Community Learning Centers Program
www.ed.gov/21stcclc/

American Reads Challenge
www.ed.gov/inits/americareads/

The Foundation Center
www.fdncenter.org

Tool 5—Budget Worksheet

Directions: This worksheet will help you think about the costs associated with operating an after-school program. The first part of the worksheet provides an itemized list of typical expenses. For each item, you should record the estimated cost and list any potential sources of funding to cover this cost. Remember, some items or services can be donated or provided at no cost to the program.

The second part of the worksheet lists potential funding sources and allows you to record the total amount of funding available from each source in order to compare your estimated costs and your estimated revenue.

Item or Service	Estimated Cost	Potential Resource
Planning and Development		
Community needs assessment		
Focus groups		
Public opinion polls		
Staff time		
Printing/publicity		
Building/modifying space		
Recruiting and developing staff		
Planning and Development Subtotal		
Operation		
Program materials		
Salaries—instructional staff		
Salaries—administrative staff		
Office supplies		
Custodial services		
Transportation		
Utilities		
Telephone and fax machines		
Computer systems		
Insurance		
Operation Subtotal		
Total Costs		

Tool 5—Budget Worksheet (continued)

Potential Funding Sources	Estimated Contribution
Local government	
School district	
State grants	
Federal grants	
Foundations	
Parent/teacher organizations	
Local civic and service clubs	
Local businesses	
Tuition and user fees*	
Other	
Total Revenue	

***Note:** Participation must be affordable for families in the community. Be careful of fees that are too high and, therefore, inaccessible to families whose children may be most at risk of academic failure.

This tool was adapted from U.S. Department of Education. (1997, July). Appendix B: Community learning center budget worksheet. *Keeping schools open as community learning centers: Extending learning in a safe, drug-free environment before and after school.* Washington, DC: Author. [Online]. Available: www.ed.gov/pubs/LearnCenters/

Collaboration and Community Building

Collaboration is not about bringing together organizations, it's about bringing together people.

As you strive to build bridges to the community, keep this central idea in mind: Collaboration is not about bringing together organizations, it's about bringing together people. And because collaboration and community building are about people, your efforts will encounter everything from noble ideas to self-interest, aspirations for the common good to desires for personal ownership, and leadership that empowers to leadership that stifles. To create a successful collaboration, you and your partners will need to acknowledge and address this mixed bag of human characteristics through an environment, structure, and incentive system that channel productive tendencies and curb unproductive ones. Though not without frustrations, the end result of this process will be a much stronger program than you (or any one group of people) could create on your own.

Building a Collaborative Relationship

In *Transforming Schools Into Community Learning Centers*, Steve Parson outlines 12 things you need to know about building a collaborative relationship:

Credibility	The initiators of the collaborative effort must have a high level of credibility within the community.
Shared concerns	Concerns that are shared across organizational boundaries are the force that brings organizations together.
Trust building	Before any collaborative action can be taken, the partners must begin the process of mutual trust building.
Provision for bailout	Each organization brought to the table to consider a collaborative effort should be able to exit gracefully if the emerging collaborative does not fit within that organization's mission.
Resources	To be successful, every collaborative effort must have resources committed to its program of work.
Shared decision making	Decision making must be done openly through the participation of all partners.
Consensus process	Consensus must be used to obtain the support of all partners
Realistic early goals	The early goals of a collaborative should be realistic and obtainable in a fairly short period of time in order to build momentum.
Evaluation	A commitment must be made to evaluate the results of the collaborative effort.
Celebration	Every success achieved by the collaborative should be celebrated.
Moving to a higher level	As success is achieved in the initial stages, subsequent goals should be set at higher, more challenging levels.
Being ready to fold the tent	As the reasons for the formation of the specific collaborative disappear, there may be a need for the collaborative to disband and move to other concerns, perhaps with other partners.

Parson, S. R., (1999). *Transforming schools into community learning centers*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

This chapter will focus on three decision points in your efforts to build collaboration:

- **How do you decide on the appropriate partners?**
- **How do you expand your partnership group?**
- **What is the role of the advisory board?**

How Do You Decide on the Appropriate Partners?

As with any good partnership, a collaboration should encourage each partner to add its own broadly defined resources to those of other partners to create a synergy—a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Vital collaborative components include the attributes each partner brings to the table and the characteristics created in forming the relationship.

In the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation's *Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey* (1994), the authors propose that potential partners should identify their self-interests upon entering into a collaborative relationship. As a leader concerned with the good of your program, you have a right and a responsibility to seek relationships that will directly benefit the program. Thus, one of your first steps is thinking strategically to connect your vision for the program to potential partnerships. That way you will have a better idea of whom you could partner with and how you will need to structure that relationship. At the most basic level, you will need to ask, Can I work with this group (or person)? Can the rest of my staff (and/or volunteers)? Can they work with us? If the answers are no, chances are your program does not have the time or resources available to make a true partnership work. Your efforts probably will be better focused on a more promising relationship.

From the Field: Collaboration

*The Walter C. Young Human Resource Center, Florida**

Programs	Traditional middle school curriculum; racquetball and handball; youth after-school care; infant day care; dinner theater; consumer education; child abuse information center; a seniors' information and activities center; a conference center; meeting rooms; a fitness center; as well as parent education, family counseling, high school completion, and leisure classes
Management	Codirectors: middle school principal, community school center director; budgeting, scheduling, and programming for the whole center are done on a cooperative basis
Program Responsibilities	
Principal	Middle school operations; **jointly** responsible for Resource Center and Programs
Center Director	Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes and leisure classes, day care facility, and dinner theater; **jointly** responsible for Resource Center and Programs
Reporting Channels	
Principal	Reports to school board concerning middle school; **jointly** reports to the city concerning the Resource Center; **jointly** reports to the Walter C. Young Human Resource Center Board of Directors for the center as a whole
Center Director	Reports to school board concerning ABE and leisure classes; **jointly** reports to the city concerning the Resource Center; **jointly** reports to the Walter C. Young Human Resource Center Board of Directors for the center as a whole
Board of Directors: Membership	• 3 citizens appointed by school board • 3 citizens appointed by the city • Representative of the district's superintendent • Representative of the city's chief administrative office • An ex-officio member from the district's department of adult, vocational, and community education • An ex-officio member from the city's human services department
Board of Directors' Responsibilities	• Receives monthly activities report from the codirectors • Offers advice and support in solving problems and obtaining resources for the center
Budgets	• Middle school budget is funded by the state on a per-pupil basis like other schools in the state; budget is the concern of the school board • ABE and leisure classes budget is funded both by state money for GED and basic education classes and by fees generated in the leisure classes; budget is the concern of the school board • Infant day care and dinner theater budgets come from and are the concern of the city
Facility Use	• Center director schedules all events • Agreed upon rules for use of the site guide the center director • Middle school program has priority during traditional school day and week • City has priority during the weekends

*Example taken from MacKenzie, D., & Vernon R. (1997, Spring/Summer). The full service school: A management and organizational structure for 21st century schools. *Community Education Journal*, 9-11.

Potential Partners

- K-12 schools
- Senior citizen centers
- Civic groups
- Local businesses
- Arts and science community (e.g., museums, zoos, music ensembles, theaters, parks)
- Local recreation centers
- Law enforcement agencies
- Colleges/universities
- AmeriCorps programs
- Professional membership groups
- Social service agencies
- Faith communities
- Youth-serving agencies
- Volunteer organizations
- Other nonprofits (e.g., Junior Achievement, local literacy organizations)

How Do You Expand Your Partnership Group?

Finding Partners

When looking for partners, think first about the relationships you already have. Are there any "donor" or "sponsor" relationships that could be cultivated to the level of partnership? The process takes many forms: developing a foundation of trust, building a reputation for effectiveness, using established relationships to build connections with new potential partners, and so on. As convinced as you are as to the "worthiness" of the program, it may take time to prove to other organizations/groups of people that the program has the mission, philosophy, potential effectiveness, and sustainability that will make them feel comfortable enough to commit their own resources and reputation.

Based on the vision for the program, you will need to assess how to get from present reality to future vision. This assessment should be as specific as possible. For example, if you know that the program is in need of computer literacy offerings, you can target organizations that provide such programs. Creating a prioritized inventory of program needs can be an important step in finding an organization with which to build a mutually advantageous relationship. **Tool 6, Matching Program Needs With Available Assets,** offers an inventory worksheet that may help you identify specific needs of the program and, in turn, find appropriate partners.

Thinking creatively also is a useful measure for finding partners. Try searching your city's Web site or phone book for lists of nonprofit organizations and public agencies with missions that support the program's mission. Call the Chamber of Commerce to get a list of businesses in the community. Keep in mind all the ways in which your program could connect with local colleges and universities. The worst any group can say is no, so go ahead and ask! Be sure to check first on any legal/organizational stipulations your program might face in how or with whom it establishes a partnership. The box at the left offers some suggestions for possible partners.

Even as you cast a wide net, keep in mind that your program will probably forge truly collaborative relationships with only a few partners. Though many organizations may help the program with "sponsorship" or "cooperative" relationships, deep collaboration requires a higher level of commitment and cultivation. Creative thinking can help you generate a list of *potential* collaborators. Strategic thinking can help you decide which partnerships to pursue the most vigorously.

Establishing a Relationship

In identifying some potential groups with whom to partner, keep in mind these questions:

- Is the mission and overall vision of this organization closely aligned with our mission and vision?
- What are our expectations for a relationship with this partner?

- What resources/services/materials will this partner bring to the relationship?
- What does our program bring to the relationship?

You should have a fairly concrete idea of your answers before beginning discussions with a potential partner. These answers will help lay the groundwork for the relationship. At the same time, it helps to be open to areas of collaboration that you may not initially envision. Your potential partner may think of collaborative ventures that didn't occur to you at first.

If the group is interested in working with the program after this initial discussion, you will need to work through the details of exactly how the partnership would work. Open communication is *essential* in this process. **Tool 7, Partnership Planning/Advisory Group Worksheet,** provides a worksheet to guide you in establishing a relationship with your partner.

Sharing Leadership

Although there may be a few struggles along the way, shared authority should be the goal for your partnerships. In a true collaboration, the distinction between "us" and "them" should blur to become an "our." Sharing leadership should be seen as an expansion of perspectives rather than a ceding of power—a situation that often does not match reality. It will take the active commitment of all partners to focus on the mission of the collaborative effort rather than their own independent drives. Additionally, collaborative leadership suggests an acknowledgment that *all* staff and volunteers should feel empowered to act as "leaders" within their own roles. Leadership involves being assertive, motivational, and trustworthy; taking responsibility for one's actions; building the capacity of others; and developing relationships with others. Consider some of the following tips to help you in facilitating collaborative leadership:

- **Establish an efficient leadership structure with clarified roles and responsibilities:** Who's doing what?
- **Establish a system that recognizes collaborative leadership:** Never underestimate the power of incentives.
- **Maintain open communication:** Everyone involved needs to be kept informed. They need opportunities to communicate so they can share information and reduce potential miscues and misunderstandings.
- **Foster commitment to the mission:** Facilitate an environment in which the beliefs that are shared by everyone are regularly focused on, so that even during heated discussions, collaborators will remember that they do share common ground.
- **Share public acknowledgment:** Each collaboration partner needs to recognize in public the contributions of all collaborators. Collaborators need to agree to sink or swim together, at least until the end of their relationship.

Partnership Discussion

- Outline the philosophy, mission, and vision of the program.
- Describe the proposed program/area of partnership.
- Highlight the need for the program/area of partnership.
- Outline the mutual benefits of the partnership.
- Invite the partner to suggest other programs/areas of partnership.
- Discuss the expectations for the program/area of partnership.
- Draft a "Memo of Understanding," outlining the respective responsibilities of each partner.
- Be prepared, polite, and concise.

Potential Advisory Board Roles

- Make programming suggestions
- Help create job descriptions/hiring procedures
- Aid in drawing up program operational policies
- Offer advice in funding allocations
- Participate in fundraising
- Help with marketing
- Avoid involvement in day-to-day operations

What Is the Role of the Advisory Board?

In keeping with the idea of bringing together multiple perspectives united in a shared sense of mission, you may want to create an advisory board. It's one way programs can gain valuable guidance from community members and parents about their direction and operation. In some programs, the advisory board may act simply as a sounding board—a place to seek advice. In others, the board may play a role in decision making. Its exact role may depend on the stipulations established in your partnership or funding source, but you also may decide how active the advisory board will be based on the input and commitment it shows in the early going.

The advisory board can be a vehicle to support your collaborative relationships. Offering collaborators a seat on your program's advisory board signals your eagerness to involve your partners fully in the program's work. Sitting on the advisory board gives your collaborators the chance to learn regularly about the scope of the program's operations, not just the specific area on which you are working together. Finally, involvement in the advisory board creates a level of buy-in for your partners, which helps foster a shared purpose. Keep in mind, though, that your advisory board is not just a "marketing" opportunity to keep current collaborators or gain new ones. Rather, it should be a group that reflects a full array of perspectives, from parents to school board members and from students to business leaders. The board also can include program partners—agencies or individuals who provide program activities. This broad-based composition will help your program be more reflective of and responsive to the needs of the whole community.

Tool 7, the worksheet on establishing a relationship with a partner, also can be modified to help you structure the goals and framework of your advisory board.

Conclusion

Collaboration is a fundamental aspect of a successful after-school program because it is a fundamental aspect of "community." Without a commitment to join forces with a wide variety of people and organizations in pursuit of a common mission, your program can only unite the ideas, programs, resources, and hopes of the few. Collaboration does require that desires for sole organizational authority be put aside in favor of the greater concern of mission fulfillment. But programs that have weathered the difficulties of bringing together diverse people with diverse perspectives on what constitutes the best path towards mission fulfillment have found that the end result is a program that truly is *of the community.*

Key Points to Remember

- A collaboration should encourage each partner to add its own broadly defined resources to those of other partners to create a synergy—a whole greater than the sum of its parts. One of your first steps is to connect your vision for the program to potential partnerships. Once this step is accomplished, you will have a better idea of whom you could partner with and how you will need to structure that relationship.
- When looking for partners, look at expanding the relationships you already have; create a prioritized inventory of program needs to find an organization that can meet them; and think creatively.
- An advisory board can be a vehicle to support your collaborative relationships. Offering collaborators a seat on the board signals your eagerness to involve your partners fully in the program's work.

Collaboration and Community Building Tools

Tool 6—Matching Program Needs With Available Assets
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Tool 7—Partnership Planning/Advisory Group Worksheet
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Tool 6—Matching Program Needs With Available Assets

Directions: This tool may be used in conjunction with other tools in this guide to match identified program needs with available assets. The tool also provides space to record steps, timelines, and groups responsible for bringing together program needs with assets. You may copy this form as needed.

Grade Level	Subject/Topic Area on Which to Focus	Possible Resources to Dedicate to This Need	Possible Groups Able to Contribute to Fulfilling the Need	Steps Needed to Establish These Partnerships	Timeline/Person or Group Responsible for Steps
	Priority 1				
	Priority 2				
	Priority 3				

Tool 7—Partnership Planning/ Advisory Group Worksheet

Directions: This tool may be used to think through issues and record decisions related to forging a partnership with another organization. In some cases, the consideration may require a joint response rather than individual responses from the program and partner. The table is formatted to show when a joint response is needed. This tool also can be modified to plan the goals of your program's advisory group. Use this tool to draft a "Memo of Understanding" with your partner.

Consideration	Center Response	Partner Response
Goals for the partnership		
Respective responsibilities:		
Day-to-day program management		
Programming decisions		
Staffing		
Staff training		

Tool 7—Partnership Planning/Advisory Group Worksheet (continued)

Providing materials		
Budget decisions		
Facilities use decisions		
Program evaluation		
Other _____ _____ _____ _____ _____		

Tool 7—Partnership Planning/Advisory Group Worksheet (continued)

Reporting channels		
Governance structure and processes	Joint Response:	
Method for establishing meeting time and place and for deciding meeting preparation responsibilities	Joint Response:	
Communication structure to encourage partners to discuss perceptions, satisfaction levels, and suggestions for relationship	Joint Response:	

Tool 7—Partnership Planning/Advisory Group Worksheet (continued)

Process for resolving conflict	Joint Response:
Process for ensuring partners receive recognition for contribution to mission	Joint Response:
Process for evaluating usefulness of the relationship	Joint Response:
Other: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	Joint Response:

PROGRAMMING

Programming is not static. Indeed, it should be a dynamic, responsive component that allows you to fulfill participants' needs.

Most people will know your program by the activities you offer. In fact, your programming will be the substance and essence of the public's knowledge and understanding of your program. It is the most fundamental and visible element of your program. Selecting, designing, and operating activities will likely bring forth the most ideas, opinions, and tension of running the program.

Different after-school programs will offer different activities. No sole, precise content exists—nor is best—for all programs. Some programs offer primarily academic, highly structured activities for students. Others provide an array of loosely structured recreational activities for community members of all ages. Many try to develop a blend of these formats. Your program should offer the type, balance, and number of activities that best fit its circumstances: its needs, assets, interests, requirements, problem areas, available skills, participants, staff, environment, etc. Asking the right questions and considering multiple viewpoints can help you determine activities that match your circumstances.

Programming is not static. Indeed, it should be a dynamic, responsive component that allows you to fulfill participants' needs. For example, declining student math scores might prompt a new math club; growing student interest may precipitate a soccer league; a rise in grants or donations may extend program hours. Clearly, programming can and should change as circumstances change.

When creating programming, a number of decisions must be made concerning selection, design, and operation. This chapter focuses on four main questions:

- **How do you choose activities that meet participants' needs and that use assets well?**
- **How do you recruit participants for programs?**
- **What factors should you study when considering contracting with external vendors?**
- **How should you structure programs each day?**

How Do You Choose Activities That Meet Participants' Needs and That Use Assets Well?

When beginning to design the activities for a program, the planning group must address many issues, including the wishes of parents and community members, the interests of staff, funding requirements, resource limitations, and more. To help guide their programming decisions, the planning group should:

- Consider the needs and preferences of everyone involved.
- Align after-school activities with the school day.

- Balance academics, enrichment, recreation, and service activities.
- Determine available assets.

Considering the Needs and Preferences of Stakeholders

The activities in an after-school program should reflect the philosophy, vision, mission, and goals approved by the program's governing board. Thus, a program with a vision of "offering safe, nurturing alternatives to gang participation" might provide special interest clubs and team sports; whereas, a program with the mission of "improving academic achievement for the lowest-performing students" might focus on tutoring sessions, mentor programs, and enrichment activities. When considering your audiences' needs and preferences, first look at each possible activity with respect to how it will further the program's ultimate vision. Include in this assessment an examination of what activities are necessary to improve the lives of the participants. To fulfill this ambitious task, programs must determine important life skills, weak academic areas, student interests, and times when youth most need a safe place.

In addition to these needs, your program also may have requirements that must be met. The following questions can help your staff think through needs and preferences:

- What kinds of programs will lead to the fulfillment of your mission?
- What do student assessments reveal are necessary areas of remediation?
- What do economic and social trends—both national and local—reveal about programs needed to prepare students for a healthy, fulfilling life?
- What grant and legal requirements exist concerning program offerings?

From the Field: Programming*

Before the Black Youth in Action (BYIA) program began in Cleveland County, North Carolina, its director rode school buses home with students who lived in the neighborhoods targeted by the program. The director hoped to get to know them better, to find out what kinds of after-school program activities they wanted, and to familiarize himself with their communities. He also introduced himself to the parents, explained the program to them, and attended community events to get to know the neighborhood better. He asked parents to complete a survey, inquiring about what their children did after school, what kinds of after-school activities they wanted for their children, and whether or not they wanted an after-school program at the school. The director then surveyed the students to discover what they normally did after school to determine whether or not they would be interested in attending an after-school program and to pinpoint what activities they wanted in an after-school program. Ultimately, the program coordinators used the parent and student survey responses to plan and design program activities.

*Adapted from *After-School Program Handbook: Strategies and Effective Practices.* (1998, November). Center for Urban and Regional Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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- What do surveys of students reveal about their program preferences? (See **Tool 8, Student Survey,** for a sample survey that you can adapt and use to gauge students' preferences.)
- What do surveys of teachers reveal about their program preferences? (See **Tool 9, Teacher Survey,** for a sample survey that you can adapt and use to gauge teachers' preferences.)
- What do surveys of parents reveal about their program preferences? What do these surveys reveal about their scheduling and other logistical preferences? (See **Tool 10, Parent Survey,** for a sample survey that you can adapt and use to gauge parents' preferences.)
- What times do national, state, and local statistics reveal are best to keep students in supervised programs and "off the streets"?

Aligning After-School Activities With the School Day

Many after-school programs focus on improving academic achievement. To achieve this goal, it is important to maintain a strong alignment between the after-school program and the school day. Alignment, however, does not mean enlargement; it does not mean that the after-school program merely extends the school day. Rather, it means that the program and school parallel one another with content, as allies not as copies. Good after-school programs look, sound, and operate differently than traditional day programs. After-school classes are smaller and more informal, with an emphasis on active student participation. Students can generate their own ideas for activities, which can be completed in shorter (or longer) time blocks than in the traditional school day. Activities can be voluntary and they can take place in any setting. After-school activities enhance and enrich the lessons offered during the traditional day.

Alignment does not mean enlargement. It means that the program and school parallel one another with content, as allies but not as copies.

The following questions should help you identify how well your programming is integrated with the school day:

- Are programs selected and designed based on needs revealed by the school's student assessments?
- Are programs selected and designed around curriculum guidelines?
- Are programs aligned with standards adopted by the district or state?
- Are programs selected, designed, and operated based (at least in part) on teacher feedback? (Use **Tool 11, Identifying Teacher Programming Needs.**)
- Do teachers regularly share the specific needs of students—skills that should be learned more completely—with after-school staff? (**Tool 11** also is useful in gathering this information.)
- Do programs include activities (e.g., field trips, student performances, lab experiments, use of community space or resources) that build upon school-day lessons by using the less-restrictive requirements and time constraints available after school?

Balancing Academics, Enrichment, Recreation, and Service Activities

Just as there is no single best way to operate an after-school program, there is no single balance of activities that is best for every program. To make sound programming decisions, you must examine the needs of the "whole" student. If your program becomes a place where students simply do their homework, the students miss out on opportunities to explore new interests and talents, develop leadership skills, and give back to the community. Likewise, a program that becomes a place only to play basketball and eat cookies ignores very real student needs for skills and knowledge.

The key to most successful after-school programs is balance. Although there are many variations, one common program format integrates several different kinds of activities: first a snack, then regular academic work, followed by a choice of recreational activities. In addition, family activities or field trips can be scheduled for evenings, weekends, or days when school is not in session.

Although it may seem trivial, snack time is an important component. After a day at school, children are hungry. Snacks should be nutritious and easy to prepare and serve. Some programs adopt snack serving as a transition between a highly structured school day and a more informal after-school period. With young students, snack serving also can be a learning opportunity. Math concepts may be reinforced while preparing and providing snacks. Menu creation can strengthen literacy skills. Finally, when students take part in food preparation, serving, and workspace clean up, they acquire valuable life skills.

For some after-school programs, the academic portion consists of tutoring or homework assistance. Others use computer programs to reinforce basic skills and concepts. Still others create themes for a week or term and offer a variety of reading, science, and math activities that relate to that theme. Academic special-interest groups (e.g., a math club, workshops on developing a science fair project, a debate group, a computer club) expand possibilities and curiosity in learning.

Recreational activities can include sports (important for physical and emotional development), drama, movies, music, art, cooking, games requiring higher-order thinking skills (chess, mancala, strategy card and board games), and personal development groups. Despite their "nonacademic" classification, recreational activities can provide many opportunities for learning.

Many after-school programs devote time to service learning or community-service activities, which strengthen citizenship and responsibility along with life skills. Activities such as an Adopt-a-Highway project or reading to seniors give back to the community. An internship with the local newspaper can develop career skills.

Do not despair if your current mix of programs is not your ideal. Resource limits or other constraints may keep you from offering your desired range of activities. Instead, remember this motto: "If you can't do what you want, do what you can and make concrete plans for the rest."

The following questions may guide your selection of programs:

- What do student assessments reveal about the degree of academic programming needed?
- What stipulations on the mix of program types are part of any grant, partnership, or legal requirements?
- What do surveys reveal about parent and teacher preferences for the mix of program types?
- What program types are offered already by other organizations at or near your location and should not be duplicated?
- What does student attendance reveal about the balance of programs offered? (For example, if few students attend your sports programs, recreational opportunities may be available elsewhere. In this case, you may want to focus on other types of programs.)

Use **Tool 12, Program Schedule,** to help with program planning. Refer to the sample schedule to see how, when, and where various activities can be integrated into a program. Use the blank form in the second part of the tool to plan out your after-school schedule.

Determining Available Assets

When selecting programs, it is important to analyze your available resources. However, resource constraints should not be the primary factor in program selection. If teacher feedback, student assessments, and opinion polls all suggest that a program is needed, but the resources are not currently available, you may want to look for other ways to offer the program. See the box at the right for some suggestion. *Do not* allow a needed program to linger indefinitely simply because resources are not immediately available. Be creative and consider every option when trying to find help, but also be mindful of where you turn for help. A sound record, skilled leadership, and established merit are important characteristics for any individuals or organizations with whom you work.

When Resources Are Scarce...

- Look for new resources.
- Partner with another organization to offer the program.
- Scale back the program but still offer it.
- Suggest the program to another organization that can offer it.
- Draw up a concrete plan to offer the program in the near future.

How Do You Recruit Participants for Programs?

Even with a wonderful set of activities, your program cannot be labeled a success if nobody attends it. Recruitment issues exist at all grade levels. If you serve young children (i.e., K-4), parents usually will ensure that they attend the program. Attendance is far less dependable at the middle or junior high school level. It has been said that "junior high students vote with their feet." If your programs are unappealing to students, they will not come. After selecting and designing what you think is a solid set of programming alternatives, ask yourself this question: What can we do to ensure that participants come to and benefit from the program? And when working with students in middle or junior high school, consider the following suggestions:

- Have several students on the program planning board to ensure that offerings pass the "cool and fun to do" test.
- Have participants recruit fellow students for the program. Ask them to design slogans, incentives, posters, PA announcements, etc. Convince popular students to join and popular teachers to advertise. Word of mouth is a powerful tool for drawing participants—especially if it comes from well-liked classmates and teachers.
- Allow students to take leadership roles (e.g., making decisions, delegating tasks) in after-school clubs.
- Create programs in which older students work with younger ones. Everyone likes to feel important; an older student who has a hard time interacting with peers or adults may get a boost in confidence and communication from working with a younger student who looks up to him or her.
- Offer programs with a social component. These appeal strongly to adolescents, who tend to focus on social matters.
- Select staff members who understand adolescents and enjoy being with them.
- When planning family activities, be sure to provide time for the young people to interact as a group. Some adolescents shy away from being seen in public with their families.
- Offer "grown-up" activities such as a trip to the theatre or a meal at a nice restaurant. Establish programs that move students out of a narrow, closed regimen and into the community.
- Offer programs that present grooming tips or that focus on social skills in a nonthreatening manner.

What Factors Should You Study When Considering Contracting With External Vendors?

The convenience and potential effectiveness of externally developed after-school curriculas have prompted many programs to purchase curriculum packages from commercial vendors. For program that have the resources to purchase them, these packages may offer an advantage over creating a new after-school curriculum. It is important to consider all of the pros and cons when deciding whether or not to purchase a commercially developed program that has proven successful at other sites.

Use **Tool 13, Outlining Program Expectations and Matching Potential Vendor Services,** to help think through key issues of vendor selection.

After you choose a vendor but before you sign a contract, be sure to clarify—in writing—the following things:

- Contract length (if applicable)
- Exact type and amount of materials and/or services provided

Pros and Cons of Purchasing an Externally Developed After-School Program	
Pros	**Cons**
✓ Proven potential effectiveness ✓ Established curriculum ✓ Existing materials (which can save on time, money, and other resources) ✓ Available technical assistance ✓ Potential network of support with other users of the program ✓ Potential for simple, efficient evaluation since evaluation procedures may be part of the purchased package	✓ Probably more expensive than models based on staff design or publicly available program ideas ✓ Less flexibility for instructors ✓ Possible difficulty gaining agreement among staff regarding the purchase and implementation of a program ✓ Potential arena of controversy among community members ✓ Potential problem of getting approval for the purchase

- Cost and payment schedule (e.g., Can the vendor lease or contract its services to coincide with a program budget that does not account for a price increase over a two- to three-year period?)
- Intellectual property rights issues
- Contact information for immediate technical assistance
- Stipulations for contract termination, product return, refund, etc.

These points cover only a few of the issues to consider when signing an agreement with a vendor. Be sure to consult with your district's or program's attorneys before signing any contract.

How Should You Structure Programs Each Day?

An after-school program's staff often has greater freedom and flexibility than a school staff in deciding how each day will be structured. Nevertheless, after-school staff still must make certain decisions about the structure of the daily program to maximize participants' learning experiences. Consider the following questions:

- Should all participants have to preregister or are drop-ins welcome?
- Will the programming calendar follow the school calendar or use another format (e.g., weekly or monthly)?
- Will the programming have a unifying theme? If so, what is it?
- Will the after-school program offer special events (e.g., field trips, theater outings, holiday parties)?

After-School Program Vendors*	
The Activities Club 59 Rosedale Road Watertown, MA 02472 (800) 873-5487 or (617) 924-1556 www.ActivitiesClub.com	Mad Science of Northern Illinois 444 Lake Cook Road, Suite 11 Deerfield, IL 60015 (847) 374-1212 www.madscience.org
AGC United Learning 1560 Sherman Avenue Evanston, IL 60201 (800) 421-2363	Newsline Publications P.O. Box 8114 Pittsburgh, PA 15217 (412) 781-0595
ETA—VersaTiles 620 Lakeview Parkway Vernon Hills, IL 60061 (800) 445-5985	Quality Improvement Associates 645 North Michigan Avenue, Suite 800 Chicago, IL 60611 (312) 761-2698
Kid Kits 1300 Allison Street, NW Washington, D.C. 20011 (202) 2234-KIDS	Voyager 1125 Longpoint Avenue Dallas, TX 75247 (214) 631-0990
Lightspan Lightspan.com 10140 Campus Point Dr. San Diego, CA 92121 (858) 824-8000	Foundations, Inc. East Gate Dr. Mt. Laurel, NJ 08054 www.foundations-inc.org (888) 977-5437

* This list does not imply endorsement by NCREL or any other agencies sponsoring this publication, nor is it an exhaustive list of all vendors in this market.

The table on the next page offers some options for several tasks: requiring lesson plans, performing instructor observations, meeting with instructors, and evaluating the academic achievement of participants. The table presents a continuum from little structure or accountability to a high degree of structure or accountability. You may want to "mix and match" different levels of stringency among the categories. For example, you may require weekly submission of each day's objectives (a high degree of structure) and meet with instructors only in grade-related groups every semester (a lower degree of structure). There are no right and wrong selections—only better and worse selections based on your participants' needs and your program's goals. For most programs, requiring the submission of lesson objectives for the remedial reading program makes good sense, while requiring lesson plans for the gardening club makes less sense.

To help decide the level of structure and accountability for each task, think through some of the following questions:

- What legal or grant requirements govern teacher observations, testing, or other factors related to the structure of the programs?
- How do the potential benefits of increased structure—such as more effective programs, better-prepared instructors, and more quantifiable results—compare to the potential costs of inconvenience, work overload, disagreements with different groups, etc.?

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Task	Relative Degree of Structure/Accountability ← Lower				Higher →
Lesson Plans	No requirements	Quarterly or semesterly submission of program goals	Weekly submission of the week's objectives	Weekly submission of each day's objectives	Weekly submission of each day's complete lesson plans
Instructor Observations	No observations	One or two scheduled observations a year	A few scheduled and a few unannounced observations	Frequent scheduled and a few unannounced observations	Frequent scheduled and frequent unannounced observations
Meetings With Instructors	No instruction-related meetings	Quarterly or semesterly meetings with a small group of grade- or subject-related teachers	One-on-one quarterly or semesterly meetings	One-on-one meetings linked to a large number of observations	Monthly one-on-one meetings
Evaluating Students' Academic Achievement	No collection of achievement results: informal, anecdotal evaluation	Collection of participants' pre- and posttest results of student assessments (i.e., either tests/ portfolios used in school or those based on the after-school curriculum) and use of this information to validate programs or make needed changes		Use of school- and/or program-based test/portfolio results to help determine instructor pay and/or contract renewal as well as to validate programs or make needed changes	

If you do decide to increase the structural degree of certain tasks, consider the following questions:

- How will the after-school program create an environment in which instructors agree with—and take advantage of—increased lesson plan requirements, observations, etc.?
- How will the program train staff to use standards and write lesson objectives?
- How will the program configure common planning time for staff to write objectives and review standards?
- How will the program use technology to facilitate the recording of lesson plans and objectives (e.g., weekly online submission, an electronic newsgroup, commercial software)?

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Conclusion

After-school programs are known best, whether favorably or unfavorably, for their programming. Strong programs are the result of careful planning and assessment, which benefit from input from staff, participants, parents, families, and community members. Your community has specific needs; your programs should address those needs. Continuous monitoring of programs is another key to success. Never settle for the status quo but always strive to improve your programs based on new facts, surveys, suggestions, or needs—and your participants and your staff will reap the benefits. If you use commercial programs or adopt ideas from other after-school sites, be sure that these additions are an advantage, not a detriment. Your programming will be the best for students, staff, parents, and community partners if you customize it according to their circumstances and needs and to your program's vision, goals, and resources.

Key Points to Remember

- Programming is the most fundamental and visible element of your program.
- Programming can and should change as the program's circumstances change.
- Activities should reflect the vision and goals of your program.
- People who make programming decisions should examine the needs of the "whole" student, who has to learn and grow in all areas of life and study.
- Do not allow a necessary program to linger indefinitely simply because resources are not easily or immediately available.
- If your activities are unappealing, participants will not attend your after-school program.
- Program staff must choose degrees of structure and accountability that maximize participants' learning experiences.

PROGRAMMING TOOLS

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Tool 8—Student Survey

Directions: You may use or adapt this survey to determine students' programming preferences for the after-school program. Make multiple copies of the survey and ask teachers to distribute and collect it during homeroom period or at another convenient time.

Survey of Student Program Preferences

We need your help! We want to create an after-school program that is exciting and useful for you. Please answer the following questions to tell us about your opinions and ideas for after-school activities. If you would like to get even more involved in planning after-school activities or being a club officer, ask your teacher for more information about the after-school program.

1. Please check the sentence that best describes your feelings about attending an after-school program at our school. *(check one)*

   ❑ I already participate in after-school activities.

   ❑ I would definitely be interested in going to an after-school program at our school.

   ❑ I have other responsibilities after school and could not go to an after-school program at our school.

   ❑ I would not be interested in going to an after-school program at our school.

2. What kinds of activities would you like to do after school? Feel free to add your own ideas. *(check up to four)*

   ❑ Chess
   ❑ Community service
   ❑ Computer club
   ❑ Homework help or tutoring
   ❑ Junior Achievement
   ❑ Photography
   ❑ Poetry writing
   ❑ School newspaper
   ❑ Science experiments
   ❑ Aerobic exercise
   ❑ Basketball
   ❑ Cheerleading
   ❑ Gymnastics
   ❑ Martial arts
   ❑ Soccer
   ❑ Softball/baseball
   ❑ Volleyball
   ❑ Yoga
   ❑ Arts and crafts
   ❑ Card and board games
   ❑ Cooking
   ❑ Dance
   ❑ Drama
   ❑ Field trips
   ❑ Music
   ❑ Peer counseling/conflict resolution
   ❑ Woodworking
   ❑ Your idea: _____
   ❑ Your idea: _____

3. What are some ways you would like to get involved in the after-school program? *(check all that apply)*

   ❑ Deciding what programs to offer
   ❑ Planning after-school activities
   ❑ Being a club officer
   ❑ Advertising the after-school program
   ❑ Your idea: _____
   ❑ I am not interested in getting involved.

Tool 8—Student Survey (continued)

4. Which types of "advertisement" would convince you to participate in after-school activities? *(check all that apply)*

- ❑ Student-designed posters
- ❑ Flyers mailed home
- ❑ Presentations by students who are in the after-school program
- ❑ Articles about the program in the school newspaper
- ❑ Daily announcements about the program (read by an adult)
- ❑ Daily announcements about the program (read by a student)
- ❑ Rewards—such as homework passes, gift certificates, or other treats—for students who regularly attend activities
- ❑ Your idea: _____
- ❑ Your idea: _____

Your Name: _____

Your Homeroom Teacher or Room Number: _____

Thank you!

Tool 9—Teacher Survey

Directions: You may use or adapt this survey to determine teachers' programming preferences for the after-school program. Be sure to "personalize" the survey by filling in the missing information wherever indicated. Then copy the survey and distribute it to teachers.

Survey of Teacher Program Preferences

We need your help! We want to create an after-school program that meets the needs of students, families, and teachers. Please tell us what activities you think we should offer and let us know what role, if any, you would like to play in the after-school program. This survey will take only a few minutes to fill out. Please give your completed survey to [Name] _____ by [Date] _____. If you have questions, please contact [Name] _____, [Telephone Number] _____. Thank you for your time!

1. Based on your experience with students, what types of activities do you think we should provide in an after-school program? *(rank your top eight choices from 1 to 8, with 1 as your top choice)*

- ❑ Chess
- ❑ Community service
- ❑ Computer club
- ❑ Homework help or tutoring
- ❑ Junior Achievement
- ❑ Photography
- ❑ Poetry writing
- ❑ School newspaper
- ❑ Science experiments
- ❑ Aerobic exercise
- ❑ Basketball
- ❑ Cheerleading
- ❑ Gymnastics
- ❑ Martial arts
- ❑ Soccer
- ❑ Softball/baseball
- ❑ Volleyball
- ❑ Yoga
- ❑ Arts and crafts
- ❑ Card and board games
- ❑ Cooking
- ❑ Dance
- ❑ Drama
- ❑ Field trips
- ❑ Music
- ❑ Peer counseling/conflict resolution
- ❑ Woodworking
- ❑ Other _____
- ❑ Other _____

2. What do you think would be the best ways to promote the after-school program to students? *(check all that apply)*

- ❑ Student-designed posters
- ❑ Flyers mailed home
- ❑ Student word of mouth
- ❑ Teacher encouragement to attend
- ❑ Presentations by students who are in the after-school program
- ❑ Articles about the program in the school newspaper
- ❑ Daily announcements about the program (read by an adult) over the PA
- ❑ Daily announcements about the program (read by a student) over the PA
- ❑ Announcements at PTA/PTO meetings

Tool 9—Teacher Survey (continued)

- ❑ Small incentives for students who come to the first meeting of a club/activity
- ❑ Bigger incentives—such as homework passes, gift certificates, or other treats—for students who regularly attend activities
- ❑ Other *(please specify)*: _____

3. In what ways do you think teachers (not necessarily you) should be involved in the after-school program? *(check all that apply)*

- ❑ Teacher input into the selection and design of programs offered
- ❑ Regular communication between teachers and after-school staff regarding student needs and integrating after-school activities with classroom lessons
- ❑ Teachers as instructors in the center
- ❑ Teacher input into the use of classrooms and equipment
- ❑ Other *(please specify)*: _____

4. Would you like to be involved in planning or offering after-school activities?

❑ Yes ❑ No

If yes, please contact [Name] _____

5. Would you be interested in being an instructor in the after-school program?

❑ Yes (go to question 6) ❑ No (you are finished with the survey)

6. If you are interested in being an instructor, please answer the following questions:

What is your name? _____

What classes/clubs would you be interested in running? _____

How many *hours* per week would you be willing to act as an instructor? _____

How many *days* per week would you be willing to act as an instructor? _____

What grade levels would you want to instruct? _____

Thank you!

Tool 10—Parent Survey

Directions: You may use or adapt this survey to determine parents' programming preferences for the after-school program. Be sure to "personalize" the survey by filling in the missing information wherever indicated. Then copy the survey and distribute it to parents. We recommend that you mail the survey to their homes and, budget permitting, include a postage-paid return envelope.

Survey of Parent Program Preferences

We need your help! We want to create an after-school program that is helpful to your child and convenient for you. Please tell us what activities you think we should offer and when, and let us know what role, if any, you would like to play in the after-school program. This survey will take only a few minutes to fill out. Please mail your completed survey to [Name] _____ by [Date] _____. If you have questions, please contact [Name] _____, [Telephone Number] _____. Thank you for your time!

1. Do you think your child/children would participate in an after-school program? *(check one)*

❑ Yes ❑ No

2. What types of activities do you think an after-school program at our school should offer? *(rank your top eight choices from 1 to 8, with 1 as your top choice)*

❑ Chess
❑ Community service
❑ Computer club
❑ Homework help or tutoring
❑ Junior Achievement
❑ Photography
❑ Poetry writing
❑ School newspaper
❑ Science experiments
❑ Aerobic exercise
❑ Basketball
❑ Cheerleading
❑ Gymnastics
❑ Martial arts
❑ Soccer
❑ Softball/baseball
❑ Volleyball
❑ Yoga
❑ Arts and crafts
❑ Card and board games
❑ Cooking
❑ Dance
❑ Drama
❑ Field trips
❑ Music
❑ Peer counseling/conflict resolution
❑ Woodworking
❑ Other _____
❑ Other _____

3. What is the *most* you would be willing and/or able to pay per child for an after-school activity that meets two times a week for 18 weeks (a total of 36 sessions)? *(check one)*

❑ I am not willing/able to pay for after-school activities.
❑ Less than $75
❑ $76 to $150
❑ $151 to $225
❑ More than $225

Tool 10—Parent Survey (continued)

4. Please indicate the days and times that you would like your child/children to be able to attend activities? *(check all that apply)*

❑ Monday	❑ Friday	❑ Before school
❑ Tuesday	❑ Saturday	❑ After school
❑ Wednesday	❑ Sunday	❑ During school vacations
❑ Thursday		❑ During the summer

5. Would your child/children need a ride home after an activity?

❑ No, I would be able to pick up my child/children after an activity.

❑ Yes, I would need the program to provide transportation for my child/children after an activity.

6. Are you interested in volunteering to help with the after-school program? *(check one)*

❑ Yes ❑ No (go to question 8)

7. In what ways would you like to volunteer? *(check all that apply)*

❑ Teach a class

❑ Help a teacher with a class

❑ Help with paperwork (e.g., keep attendance, fill out forms)

❑ Publicize the program (e.g., write for the newsletter, pass out flyers)

❑ Greet participants and answer questions

❑ Provide help wherever needed

❑ Other *(please specify)*: _____

8. Personal Information:

Your name: _____

Address: _____

Home telephone: _____

Best time of day to reach you at this telephone number: _____

Your child's/children's name(s) and grade(s):

Name _____ Grade _____

Name _____ Grade _____

Name _____ Grade _____

Thank you!

Tool 11—Identifying Teacher Programming Needs

Directions: Copy and distribute the form on the next page to teachers to determine their academic programming needs for the after-school program. Once you have collected the forms, compile the information in a table like the example below. To aid in the decision-making process, you can sort the information by grade level, subject/topic area, or priority level.

Example

Lincoln School Teacher Programming Needs

Teacher Name and Grade Level	Subject/Topic Area	Specific Skills	Priority Level
Ms. Meier, Grade 4	Math concepts	• Long division • Fractions	Medium
Mr. Davisson, Grade 4	Interacting with special needs students	• Understanding disabilities • Communicating respectfully	High
Mrs. Smythe, Grade 5	Life science labs and experiments	• Life stages of insects • Plant structures and functions	Low

Survey of Teacher Programming Needs

In order to plan effective after-school programs that support the regular school day, we are asking teachers to list the subjects or topic areas where students need additional assistance. Your suggestions should be based on assessments of student achievement, observations, student preferences, or parent feedback. For each subject or topic area, please list specific skills where students need assistance and assign a priority level—low, medium, or high—to these skills.

Teacher Name: _____

Grade Level(s): _____

Subject/Topic Area	Specific Skills	Priority Level

Tool 12—Program Schedule

Directions: Use or adapt this tool to schedule and keep track of all program offerings, including which days they are offered, time, location, staffing, and any additional information. We have provided a sample schedule to get you started.

Example

After-School Program Schedule

First quarter (September 7-November 5) of the 1999-2000 school year

Day(s) of the Week	Activity/ Grade Level	Time	Room	Instructor/Aides	Notes
M-F	Snack	2:30-3:00	Cafeteria	Parent volunteers	Give kitchen staff weekly counts
M-F	Homework Center (Grades 3-4)	3:00-4:00	12	Jim Johnson, Sylvia Kauffman (aide), community college volunteers	
M-F	Homework Center (Grades 5-6)	3:00-4:00	14	Marci Schiller, Wren Hawthorne (aide)	
M, W, Th	Papier-mache Sculpture (Grades 3-6)	4:00-5:00	Art Room	Jen Egner	Remind staff to bring newspapers
Tu, F	Community Service Club (Grades 4-6)	4:00-5:00	Library	Janice Rand Vaughn	Tu-visit senior center. F-clean school grounds
Tu, W	Drama Club (Grades 3-6)	4:00-5:00	Auditorium	Parent volunteers	Put note in newsletter about the performance
M, W, F	Soccer (Grades 3-6)	4:00-5:00	Playground (or Gym)	Andy Baldwin	
Tu-Th	Stretching Class (Grades 3-6)	4:00-5:00	Cafeteria	YMCA staff	Exercise mats
Th	Swimming at Park District Pool	4:00-5:00	Park District Pool	Erin Hayden, Park District staff	Limited to 10 students; have van ready at 3:45
M-F	Computer Games (Grades 3-6)	4:00-5:00	Computer Lab	Community college volunteers	
M-F	Board Games	5:00-6:00	Cafeteria	Jen Egner, parent volunteers	Place newspaper ad requesting donated games and puzzles

After-School Program Schedule

Date: _____

Day(s) of the Week	Activity/ Grade Level	Time	Room	Instructor/Aides	Notes

Tool 13—Outlining Program Expectations and Matching Potential Vendor Services

Directions: Before meeting with any external vendors, discuss each question with your staff and advisory board. Record your answers in the space provided. By articulating your expectations, you will be better prepared to question and negotiate with the vendors. After interviewing each vendor, rate how well the vendor meets your expectations for each question using the rating scale below. The ratings will help you select between multiple vendors or determine whether any outside vendor can meet your expectations.

Rating Scale

4—This vendor fully meets our expectations/preferred characteristics in this area.

3—This vendor nearly meets our expectations/preferred characteristics in this area.

2—This vendor somewhat meets our expectations/preferred characteristics in this area.

1—This vendor does not meet our expectations/preferred characteristics in this area.

Category 1: Results, Philosophy, Services, and Materials

1. What evidence of success (e.g., independent studies, school testimonials) would we like the vendor to possess?

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Notes:

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Tool 13—Outlining Program Expectations (continued)

2. What are the main components of our educational philosophy we would like the vendor's program to support?

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Notes:

3. Which district or state standards should the vendor's program address?

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Notes:

4. What types of materials (e.g., student books, teacher guides, assessment tools) do we want the vendor to provide? What about materials for special-needs students (e.g., bilingual texts, large print, audio tapes)?

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Notes:

Tool 13—Outlining Program Expectations (continued)

5. Do we want a program that incorporates technology? What kind of technologies? How should they be used?

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Notes:

6. What degree of instructor expertise do we want the program to accommodate (e.g., if many of our staff do not have college degrees, a program requiring all staff to have college degrees would not fit)?

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Notes:

7. How much and what type of training do we want the vendor to provide?

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Notes:

8. How much and what type of technical assistance (e.g., onsite consulting, conference calls, e-mail exchanges) do we want the vendor to provide?

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Notes:

Category II: Expected or Preferred Outcomes

9. What academic outcomes do we expect for students after one year? After three years?

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Notes:

10. What other outcomes (e.g., increased class participation and homework completion rates, better attitude toward school) do we expect for students after one year? After three years?

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Notes:

Tool 13—Outlining Program Expectations (continued)

11. What satisfaction levels do we expect for instructors after one year? After three years?

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Notes:

Category III: Programs Costs

12. How much can we afford to spend on an external program? Ideally, how much would we like to spend?

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Notes:

13. What funding methods and other resources are available to us? How well will these resources mesh with the program?

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Notes:

Tool 13—Outlining Program Expectations (continued)

Category IV: Other Important Characteristics

14. Question:

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Notes:

15. Question:

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Notes:

16. Question:

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Vendor:_____ Rating:_____

Notes:

Integrating After-School Programs With the Traditional School Day

A culture of integration depends on building trust, understanding, mutual respect, and common purpose.

After-school programs that achieve strong connections with the traditional school day report that integration actually can compound the positive results of after-school activities. These programs make what is learned during the traditional day vibrant and relevant to the lives of children.

Comprehensive after-school programs that are integrated into the regular-school program and draw on resources within the community can yield even more positive outcomes for students and their families. High-quality after-school programs create connections with the curriculum and instruction offered by the school during regular hours, but they do not duplicate what goes on during the school day. Instead, they offer highly interactive, engaging activities that stress skills acquisition, problem solving, exposure to new experiences, and significant relationships with caring adults.

Forging strong links between school and after-school programs requires changing "how things have always been done." This chapter examines several key decision areas that after-school programs face when working toward integration. However, the most important factor in achieving integration is not a formal structure of activities and policies; rather, it is the underlying feelings, perceptions, and behaviors of program and school staff. In other words, it is a "culture of integration" rather than the "policies of integration" that determines whether a link between the classroom and the after-school program is truly established.

A culture of integration depends on building trust, understanding, mutual respect, and common purpose between school and after-school staff. It cannot be forced through persuasion, logic, or policies. As you ponder the decision points in this chapter, ask yourself, "Does this discussion/action/policy build trust, understanding, respect, and a sense of common purpose among everyone involved in this initiative?" Keeping this question in mind will promote a culture of integration that policies alone could never create.

This chapter looks at the following decision points:

- **How are the respective responsibilities of the program coordinator and principal delineated?**
- **How do you create partnerships between the after-school staff and school staff (teachers, administrators, custodians, food service workers, support staff, and others)?**
- **How can the after-school program (homework help, tutoring, enrichment events, and recreational activities) link to and support the curriculum of the school day?**
- **How can you allocate space and materials in ways that avoid conflict?**

From the Field: Integration

The Cason Lane Academy,* a public school in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, has instituted a continuous 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. day with activities that are divided into three distinct focuses and that build on each other and use flex-time scheduling to enable certified teachers to lead instruction throughout the day. Traditional academic work takes place until 11 a.m.; "contemporary education," which includes individualized instruction, small-group work, and art and music classes for all, is held from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m.; and "increased opportunities," which include academics, life skills, art, and recreation classes, occur between 3 and 5 p.m. Parents have clearly responded to this integrated school day: 500 to 600 of the school's 950 students take advantage of the afternoon sessions every day. By using its resources creatively and charging a small fee ($1.25 per hour plus materials costs), the academy estimates that it provides 66 percent more educational time than traditional schools.

*This example is taken from *Keeping Schools Open as Community Learning Centers: Extending Learning in a Safe, Drug-Free Environment Before and After School*, by the U.S. Department of Education. (For copies, call 1-800-USA-LEARN or order it from the Department's Web site: www.ed.gov. Also available online at www.ed.gov/pubs/LearnCenters/.)

How Are the Respective Responsibilities of the Program Coordinator and Principal Delineated?

The relationship between the principal and program coordinator needs special attention. In some after-school programs, the coordinator is a district employee and may report to the principal for direction and supervision. In others, the coordinator is employed by an outside agency and sees him/herself as independent from the building principal. In some programs, the principal is present during the after-school program and in others he/she may be there only for a small portion of the activities.

Staff members of after-school programs have to realize that good principals have strong attachments to their staff and school. Principals also realize that district personnel, parents, and community members will hold them responsible for what occurs in the building. These factors may result in a reluctance to turn over control of the building to someone else. Once again building trust and having a shared purpose are essential.

Plan to do some of the following:

- Set a regular time to meet and discuss how things are going.
- Encourage the principal to be an active member of the advisory group.
- Request that the program coordinator be invited to meetings of school planning teams (e.g., school improvement planning committee).
- Establish clear lines of supervision.

- Agree upon the respective responsibilities of the building principal and program coordinator. (See **Tool 14, Responsibility Checklist for the Principal and After-School Program Coordinator,** for a checklist of responsibilities.)
- Remember that there are fewer demands on principals during the summer months. Thus, it may be the time to work out overall planning/timing issues.

How Do You Create Partnerships Between the After-School Staff and School Staff?

The key to developing partnerships is having shared information and shared experiences. No one likes to feel "out of the loop" or be the last to find out a key piece of information about a program or student. Because people gather information in various ways, it's important to communicate your message in various formats. Good ways to share information with teachers and staff include the following:

- Attend school staff meetings—try to be a regular part of the agenda.
- Eat lunch in the teachers' lunchroom.
- Host an informational breakfast for school staff. Serve donuts, coffee, and tidbits about the after-school program.
- Have a column in the daily/weekly/monthly school bulletin about what is happening in the after-school program.
- Have an after-school bulletin board on the wall outside the school office or wherever staff sign in and out.
- Select, appoint, or hire a liaison (preferably a school faculty member) to interact with school staff.
- Work with the school principal to establish regular meeting times between after-school and school staff.
- Use available technology (e.g., e-mail, voicemail) to allow after-school staff to remain in regular communication with school staff.
- Make time to seek out custodians and kitchen staff. Let them know what the program is doing. Ask them whether they are experiencing additional work as a result of the program.
- Use **Tool 15, Generic Memo Template.**

The key here is sharing information and informing school staff about what the program is doing. *Keep requests for help to a minimum.*

Pay attention not only to what you communicate but how you communicate it. Consider the impact of daily conversation on building a supportive culture. All staff members should ask themselves the following: "Do our discussions demonstrate respect for others as professionals?" "Do we deal with problems

openly (if possible) and constructively rather than allowing them to become the subject of rumors and bitterness?" Small, everyday interactions contribute to positive experiences that foster unity between the after-school program and the school.

How Can the After-School Program Link to and Support the Curriculum of the School Day?

A core reason for integrating the after-school program into the regular school day is to promote learning and school success for the children who participate in the program. Alignment with the school day does not imply replication of the school day. Indeed, many programs strive to offer an alternative learning environment for students who are not experiencing success in a traditional school setting. Thus, a program should not perceive that working with the school means losing what distinguishes it from the school. School and program can cooperate to bring about a broader understanding of and opportunities for learning. When teachers and after-school staff realize that they share the same goal of giving children the competence, confidence, and character to be successful, the different ways to accomplish this goal will not be seen as so divisive.

Try these strategies to promote links:

- Program staff and teachers communicate any changes they notice in a student's achievement, behavior, or attendance.
- Program participants create a newspaper that includes stories about school and program events.
- Program staff and teachers work together to assess student progress at the end of each marking period.
- Teachers provide information about the curriculum and state/local standards to after-school staff.
- Teachers present a series of inservices for after-school staff on successful literacy and math strategies.
- Program staff members plan field trips based on lessons being taught during the school day. (See **Tool 16, Field Trip Planning Flyer.**)
- Teachers provide activities for students to do during tutoring/homework center. Teachers send a list of homework for the day to tutors/homework center instructors. After-school staff members provide feedback on student progress with homework. (See **Tool 17, Homework Sharing Tool.**)
- Teachers include the after-school program in students' individual education plans (IEPs). Special education teachers work closely with program staff to plan appropriate activities for special-needs students in after-school programs.
- Program coordinators provide program enrollment forms that homeroom teachers distribute to all students.
- Teachers "recruit" students in danger of being retained for the after-school program.

From the Field: Integration

At Esperanza Elementary School in Los Angeles, the after-school program director works half-time in the school's computer lab. This dual role provides great opportunities for linking the school day and after-school program. The director sees what each class is working on, has informal contact with all of the teachers, and gets a firsthand look at what captivates and frustrates the children during the day. She uses this information to design activities in the after-school program that enrich the students' learning and that supplement areas where they are having difficulties. The information also provides an informal way to forge connections between the teachers and the after-school staff.

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- Before and during standardized testing periods, after-school staff show support by holding meetings to inform parents about the tests and plan activities to reduce student anxiety.
- Teachers invite appropriate program staff to attend conferences with parents.
- After-school staff sit in classrooms and then create art, music, and drama activities that extend classroom learning.

How Can You Allocate Space and Materials in Ways That Avoid Conflict?

Often the after-school program and the school must share space and resources. Without careful planning, much time and energy can be spent quarreling over missing pencils and erasers. Good teachers invest a lot of energy—and often their own money—to create an effective classroom. Yet, it is the community that finances classrooms and teachers, and those resources need to be tapped by any effective after-school program. The tension over "Whose school is it anyway?" may vary greatly from one school to the next, but finding a satisfactory answer to this question can ensure greater cooperation and satisfaction by all those affected by an after-school program. Sharing space for the ultimate benefit of the children is the goal. Along the way, a good after-school program can be seen as a resource to the teachers and staff of the school. Try some of the following:

- Clearly define—in writing—the space that will be used and the days/times this space will be used.
- Use "our" language to express the idea of sharing (e.g., "Our students went to the art museum.").
- Let teachers know what activities will take place in their classrooms.
- Work out a schedule with physical education staff for use of the gym and fields. If sports teams tie up all of the gyms, find alternative space at local community agencies. Remember, with a little furniture moving, some cafeterias make great gyms.
- Have more-than-adequate quantities of pencils, markers, erasers, staplers, paper, and so on. Be generous in sharing these materials with classroom teachers.
- Invest in some storage cabinets on wheels—bring supplies to the activities.
- Speak to the maintenance people early. Develop a mutually agreeable schedule for cleaning space.
- Decide what will happen if something is damaged.
- Check in regularly with teachers about how things are going.
- Express your appreciation to school staff members who share their space or assist the program. Say thank you often and in lots of ways.

Ways to Say Thank You

- Leave a written note on the blackboard.
- Have students create a giant "thank you" card.
- Leave a vase of flowers two or three times a year.
- In a newsletter, acknowledge staff who share space.
- Have an appreciation breakfast for staff who share their space or who go out of the way to help the program.
- Pass out notepads that say "I Share My Space With the After-School Program."
- Regularly check in with school staff about how things are going.
- Ask local restaurants to donate gift certificates, and then present the certificates to those who have helped your program succeed.

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Conclusion

Linking after-school programs with the traditional school day is not an easy task, nor is it one that can be forced through policies or persuasion. A policy may change behavior, but it does not change beliefs. Because integration will require a paradigm shift for most teachers, acceptance likely will be a gradual process of accumulating positive experiences as teachers work with program staff toward the shared goal of helping students be the best they can be. With a commitment to build trust through formal tactics and everyday interaction, alignment with the traditional school day can be a goal achieved by all programs.

Key Points to Remember

- Integrating an after-school program with the traditional school day cannot occur without dedication to building a culture of shared trust, understanding, respect, and a sense of common mission.
- Establishing communication that fosters integration relies on both formal tactics to increase interaction as well as informal acknowledgment of the need to treat others with respect in everyday conversations.
- Working closely with a school will not mean losing what distinguishes the after-school program from the school environment; rather, through working together, the program and school can build a broader understanding of and opportunities for learning.
- The commitment to communicate and cooperate needs to be augmented with formal agreements on certain issues.

Integrating After-School Programs With the Traditional School Day Tools

Tool 14—Responsibility Checklist for the Principal and After-School Program Coordinator
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Tool 15—Generic Memo Template
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Tool 16—Field Trip Planning Flyer
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Tool 17—Homework Sharing Tool
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Tool 14—Responsibility Checklist for the Principal and After-School Program Coordinator

Directions: The principal and after-school program coordinator should complete this checklist together. Review the tasks in column one. Add any additional tasks that may be needed. Then, for each task in column one, indicate who will be responsible—the principal or program coordinator—or whether it will be a shared responsibility. If a responsibility will be shared, decide *how* it will be shared.

Task	Principal	After-School Coordinator	Shared
Secure space for after-school activities.			
Inform classroom teachers that their classrooms will be used.			
Provide supplies/materials for after-school programs.			
Handle discipline issues that arise in after-school programs.			
Communicate with parents about the content of after-school programs.			
Recruit students for after-school programs.			
Decide on the type of activities to be offered.			
Hire and supervise staff of after-school programs.			
Register participants for after-school programs.			
Define the after-school staff's training needs.			

Tool 15—Generic Memo Template

Directions: Print this letter on your program's letterhead. If you do not have letterhead, use bright paper.

Dear _____,

[Fill in the blank with one of the following: Teacher, School Nurse, School Counselor, Kitchen Staff, Custodian, Principal, or other.]

Here is some timely information about our after-school program that you should know:

OR

I'm happy to share the following information with you:

OR

Just want to keep you posted on the following developments in our after-school program:

[Add your information here. Be sure to keep it to just two or three sentences; no one has time to write or read a lot.]

Please let me know if you would like more information or if you have a suggestion about something we can do to improve our program.

Sincerely,

[Your name, address, telephone number]

Tool 16—Field Trip Planning Flyer

Directions: Create a letter or flyer using this tool to share with teachers in your local school.

Dear Teacher,

Our after-school program is planning field trips for the next few months. Currently, we have the following trips planned:

[List trips here.]

We know that field trips are a wonderful way to extend the learning that goes on in your classroom. We are willing to plan an after-school field trip that supports a part of your curriculum. For example:

- If you are studying a particular play, we could go to a performance.
- If your class is studying Egypt, we could arrange a visit to an antiquities museum.
- If your class is studying plants and photosynthesis, we could take a trip to an arboretum.

[Provide another example, if appropriate.]

If you would like to discuss ways in which after-school field trips might support the teaching you are doing, please contact:

[Provide complete contact information here.]

P.S. We are willing to work with you to create study guides for the field trips.

Tool 17—Homework Sharing Tool

Directions: This form is to be used by the classroom teacher and after-school tutor to share information about an individual student's homework assignments and study habits. For each homework assignment, the teacher fills out the information in column one and gives the form to the tutor. After assisting the student, the tutor fills out the information in column two and returns the form to the teacher.

Today's Date:	
Student's Name:	
Teacher's Name:	
Tutor's Name:	
Completed by teacher.	**Completed by tutor.**
The homework for today is:	This student: ❑ Completed the homework easily and independently. ❑ Had difficulty *understanding* what was asked in the homework. ❑ Had difficulty *completing* the homework. ❑ Had difficulty *focusing* on the assignment.
Please pay special attention to:	This student required: ❑ No help with the assignment. ❑ A little help. ❑ Occasional help. ❑ A great deal of help. ❑ See comments on back.
This homework should take _____ minutes to complete.	The homework took _____ minutes to complete.

EVALUATION

Evaluation is the process of analyzing data to assess what works and what does not work in achieving goals.

Evaluation is an important component of programs for varying reasons. Many programs require the completion of evaluation activities because it is a condition of their funding. Others use information gathered from ongoing evaluation to support claims of their programs' effectiveness.

Staff of strong programs know that evaluation is an important component of program design and implementation. But all too often, "horror stories" of this assessment process abound, whether from the difficulty of gathering and interpreting data, the long hours spent trying to answer evaluators' requests, or other frustrations. Evaluation is usually seen as something done after a program has been implemented, by an outside group who judges retrospectively whether or not the program was effective. While this situation is too often true in practice, it is not the only way—nor necessarily the correct way—to conduct an evaluation. Early in the process, preferably at the beginning, you can make decisions about what your program hopes to learn from its evaluation. A strong evaluation design will provide information that you may use daily to fine-tune and improve your program.

When undertaking an evaluation, it is important to understand the terms. Evaluation is the process of analyzing data to assess what works and what does not work in achieving goals. The word *goals* in this context is synonymous with "objectives," "outcomes," or other terms your program may use to convey changes you expect or desire. *Data collection,* on the other hand, is a *part* of full evaluation, just one step among many, during which programs gather and record information that is pertinent to their goals. This is an important distinction. Many of the evaluation forms that staff and participants are asked to complete are actually records of data collection. They are not the evaluation itself. In order to be useful, data collection has to be accompanied, or immediately followed, by the *analysis* that evaluation entails.

Thus, when approaching evaluation, take a deep breath and undertake all data collection with as much patience as possible. Then, sit down, think about what the information implies or indicates, and put that knowledge to use while improving your after-school program. This is the *fundamental purpose* of evaluation—*putting data to use.*

This chapter looks at some of the evaluation decisions that after-school programs like yours will have to make:

- **What evaluation questions are you trying to answer?**
- **How can you develop smoother, simpler, more effortless data-collection strategies?**
- **Who should do the evaluation?**
- **How can you use what you learn from evaluation in program design?**

What Evaluation Questions Are You Trying to Answer?

Good evaluations start with a set of important questions that you or someone else will try to answer during the actual evaluation. Here are sample questions you may ask yourself:

- Are we meeting our program's goals?
- Are some activities more effective than others?
- What changes in knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors will result from program activities?
- Does the funder require any specific information?
- Are some activities more popular than others?
- As a result of all the time and effort everyone has devoted to the program, what difference have we made?

Developing effective evaluation questions should be a group endeavor. All of your staff should meet and list your program's intended goals or outcomes. Then, the group can discuss how the planned activities and processes will lead to realization of these goals or outcomes. Spend some time developing the milestones or benchmarks that must be reached along the way. Work hard to find out what specific questions appeal the most to staff, family members, key community partners, and the school administration. Time spent in the beginning to develop an evaluation plan increases the likelihood that evaluation will yield convincing evidence about how your program has succeeded.

Begin by looking at the goals of your program. Are you striving for improved academic achievement? Do you want to decrease the incidence of student crime? Has your program been designed to introduce young people to the concept of community service? Regardless of the unique goals of your program, each has specific indicators. Indicators are quantified measurements that can be taken repeatedly over time to track progress. As a group, develop indicators for each goal. For example, consider an after-school program with the goal of improving community safety. While developing a list of possible indicators, good questions for the group to keep in mind are "If our goal—in this example, a safe community—were realized, what differences would we see? What would be in place?" They might generate the following indicators:

- A decline in the number of reported violent incidents
- A decline in the number of drug arrests
- A decline in gang graffiti on school grounds and in the surrounding community
- An increase in the number of adults at the school
- An increase in the number of staff/volunteers trained in first aid, conflict resolution, etc.

- An increase in the number of students trained in peer mediation
- An increase in the number of students participating in the after-school program
- Any additional indicators your group generates

Once a long list of indicators has been developed, the group must decide which indicators will be measured. Monitoring all proposed indicators is typically impractical; choices must be made to narrow down the working list of indicators.

You can use the template for **Tool 18, Developing Indicators for Program Goals,** to develop indicators for your goals. Remember that you may decide to look at only a few of the indicators you identified when the group was brainstorming.

Once you have agreed on goals, and on a set of indicators for each goal, you can begin to plan activities that lead to their eventual achievement. Decide which types of activities to offer AFTER you have established goals and selected indicators. *This order should be observed carefully.* Again, use **Tool 18** to outline goals, indicators, and activities. Refer to the sample tool in which a program group filled in the categories Program Goal, Possible Indicators, and Activities. Note that they *began* with the goal of improving mathematical abilities, *then* they chose indicators to gauge results, and *lastly* they assigned activities.

Once your program group has narrowed down a set of indicators, someone must decide what data need to be collected for each indicator. Some indicators have easy data sources such as test scores, attendance records, and disciplinary reports. Others involve cumbersome and labor-intensive procedures, for example, finding reasons why students failed to complete the activity, or attitudes of the community toward the program. In most after-school programs, staff will have to participate in data collection. Therefore, selecting strategies that do not burden your staff is a good practice.

Questions to Ask When Choosing Indicators

- Are data for this indicator easily available?
- Is this indicator relevant? (Does the indicator reveal anything about the expected result or condition?)
- Will this indicator provide sufficient information to convince both supporters and skeptics?
- Are data for this indicator currently being collected? (If not, can cost-effective mechanisms for data collection be developed?)
- Is this indicator quantitative? (If not, can the qualitative data be collected in a way that enables expressing them as quantitative data?)

How Can You Develop Smoother, Simpler, More Effortless Data-Collection Strategies?

Each indicator you have selected to track data should be matched to the right data source, as these examples demonstrate:

Indicator	Data Source
Students' math grades improve	Review of report cards Interviews of math teachers
Students report that they better understand math assignments	Student survey
Teachers report that students now have homework in on time and completed more correctly	Interviews of math teachers

Tips for Data Collection

- Collect ONLY the data you will need. For example, if you want to know simply age, grade, and ethnicity, do not ask many demographic questions.
- Ask ONLY for data you do not already have. Someone in the school office probably has the name, grade, and ethnicity of each student.
- Assign each participant an ID number. Keep data filed by that number. This practice reduces the chance of breeching confidentiality.
- Collect all the information at one time; ask for demographics when students enroll.
- Use multiple-choice rather than open-ended questions in surveys. The former are easier than the latter to tabulate and report. ALWAYS provide respondents with an equal number of choices for all questions on the same survey.
- Gain permission from parents to use information about their children. Permission could be integrated without difficulty into the registration process. Stress that information will be aggregated and will not be used to identify individual students.
- Let school personnel know—as early as possible—what data you will need from them.
- Consider purchasing commercial electronic database software to record and monitor pertinent data.

Many different ways exist by which data can be collected. Some of the more common forms are:

- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Observation
- Interviews
- Collection of demographic information about participants in the program
- Document review—looking at newsletters, meeting minutes, reports, and so on

Surveys are a very common form of data collection. **Tool 19, Tips for Creating Good Survey Questions,** provides hints for developing strong, effective surveys. Whatever way you choose to collect data, it is important that you do so in a reliable and efficient manner.

Tool 20, Participant Satisfaction Survey, is a sample evaluation form that might be given to students participating in the program. Please note that this sample would NOT serve as an example of evaluation forms for parents, staff, program partners, and so on. Forms for children should be written at their age level. Likewise, forms for adults should be written for adults.

The following table is a partial list of vendors for commercially available database software. Most of these software programs will document grade, attendance, and other types of student records. Check with the particular company for exact, unique features their software may offer.

Software Name	Web Site
Access (Microsoft)	www.microsoft.com/access
CIMS G/T (National Computer Systems, Inc., Education Data Management)	k12.ncs.com/k12/district/cims/internet.html
Cincom CARE (Cincom's Automated Resource for Education)	www.cincom.com/care/
Schoolmaster (Olympia Computing Company, Inc.)	www.schoolmaster.com
School Maestro II (Russ & Ryan EdWare)	www.rredware.com
Smartlite	www.smartlitesoftware.com/e_gener.htm
VARed	varedsw.com

*This list does not imply endorsement by NCREL or any other agencies sponsoring this publication, nor is it an exhaustive list of all vendors in this market.

From the Field: Evaluation

The learning centers of the Milwaukee Public School District have created an evaluation strategy that allows them to bring together multiple stakeholders to provide continuous quality improvement, to generate data automatically in the format required by the 21st CCLC grant, and to determine the academic impact of regular after-school participation. Using an automated system, each site spends about an hour per week at a computer uploading information (e.g., program attendance) about each student participant as required by the grant. The computer in turn matches each student participant's information with the corresponding school district data. Centers may then look for a correlation between program attendance and student outcomes (e.g., test scores, suspension rates) without using any additional tests after school. By preventing unnecessary duplicate student testing, this effort saves time, energy, and money in the after-school environment. Based on the analysis of the collected information, Action Learning Teams at each site strategize program improvements. Additionally, each site performs a self-assessment, hosts site visits from a community-based evaluation team, and surveys youth and adult participants as the means for monitoring progress toward identified goals. Sites formulate action plans around all those results. Creation of the computerized attendance tracking system required significant project staff effort and a district outlay, but the system is maintained using a relatively small amount of funds (for one computer at each site and training for each site coordinator). Despite technology's significant role in Milwaukee's system, the key components are ongoing communication and a commitment to keep stakeholders aware and involved.

Recording attendance is very important but often takes a great deal of time. Consider some of the following suggestions for keeping track of student attendance:

- Start with 50 stickers with each student's name on them. Give the student a sticker each day he or she attends. Count how many stickers you have left at the end of the session. Fifty minus the number of remaining stickers gives you the days of attendance for that student.
- Have students log on to a spreadsheet program that automatically tabulates their attendance.
- Keep student attendance records in a file box. Students should sign in each time they participate in a program.
- Hang student nametags on a board near the entrance. Students take their nametags when then enter the program. Staff should count the nametags that are left hanging and subtract that number from the total number. Students return nametags when they leave.
- Combine a snack and attendance. Students need to sign in to receive the snack.
- Have a raffle at the end of the week. Each student enters one card for each day in attendance with his or her name on it. (For a student attending five days, he or she would have five cards in the raffle and a better chance of winning the raffle than a child attending only three days.) Count the cards at the end of the week.
- Tabulate attendance weekly. This is a tedious job even in small doses. Think of ways to involve the children or other participants in taking attendance.

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Working With an External Evaluator

- **Select the firm and/or person early—before programming begins.**
- **Provide the evaluator with a copy of the grant you wrote.**
- Spend considerable time, very early and often, working together with the evaluator to develop an evaluation plan.
- Require that the evaluator spend some time on-site—attending meetings, observing programs, and becoming familiar with your program's staff.
- Spell out clearly in writing what tasks the evaluator will do and what tasks will be done by program staff; include reporting requirements.
- View the evaluator as your ally. His or her input can help your program operate more effectively and demonstrate to others the value of your efforts.
- Plan on allocating about 10 percent of your budget for payment to the evaluator.

Who Should Do the Evaluation?

As you begin the evaluation process, you should ask and answer the following questions about your program:

- Do we have the expertise on staff to design and conduct the evaluation?
- Do we have the time to manage all aspects of the evaluation?
- Are we able to look objectively at our work?
- Does our funding source permit us to do our own evaluation?

If you answer "No" to any one of these questions, your program might want to consider hiring external evaluators. These personnel can be either individuals who hold advanced degrees in evaluation or experienced practitioners in your content area. Colleges and universities are a good source for external evaluators. Also, some firms specialize in program evaluation. When possible, it is best to work with an evaluator who is familiar with your type of program. Too often, programs hire evaluation consultants who are inexperienced in working with staff and participants of after-school programs. They develop evaluation protocols that are difficult to follow in the unique after-school environment, and these methods usually yield results of limited value.

Your school district often will have people who are experienced in conducting evaluations. They are familiar with school data sources and also may know the staff working in your program. Usually, such in-house services expect program staff to do much of the data collection. These district services are viewed typically as in-kind contributions, and no fees are charged.

Should Program Staff Do the Evaluation Themselves?

Programs that do their own evaluations usually confine their efforts to meeting the evaluation requirements of their grants. Many sources exist to help novice evaluators. Look at some of the Web sites listed in **Tool 21, Helpful Resources in Data Collection and Evaluation,** to aid your personal understanding of evaluation. If you conduct your own evaluation, begin incrementally. Start with what is possible now and, when ready, gradually increase evaluation activities. It is better to evaluate a few things well—such as the impact of your program on student attendance, or how many teachers report better homework from after-school participants—rather than several poorly. Conducting program evaluation will provide program staff with valuable insight, which is especially advantageous should you choose or need to work with external evaluators.

How Can You Use What You Learn From Evaluation in Program Design?

All evaluation is useless unless the results are used to improve program operations. Staff of your after-school program should spend some time clarifying your assumptions about how a proposed program will lead to the expected outcomes

and goals of your program. This is called a model of change. It is important to be clear about the relationship between the activity and the goal. To the extent possible, your evaluation plan should measure such types of relationships. Only then will your staff be able to determine why and how the activity either succeeded in meeting its goal or failed to do so. State your program expectations precisely and exactly—then the information gathered through evaluation will be most useful and applicable.

Now consider this example: A program wants to improve the grades of low-performing students. The program's simple model of change might begin with the assumption that one-on-one tutoring is a very effective strategy. Assuming this strategy works, practicing it should mean that students will learn more fully and will likely earn better grades. After some students have received tutoring over a given time period, the staff should measure improvements, being perceptive to the constants and variables. They should ask: Did the grades of tutored students improve? Have grades of other nontutored students also improved?—in which case tutoring may not be the fundamental answer. In short, be sure that *your strategy*—not some other factor—caused the change.

Emphasize the Ongoing Nature of Evaluation

Annual evaluation alone may allow problems to remain for a whole year before they become apparent and steps are taken to address them. To avoid this unnecessary delay, programs should make time and resource decisions that allow for ongoing assessment. Consider these ways to continually integrate evaluation:

- Provide structured time for program staff to collect pertinent data and to meet and discuss long-term program goals of your program.
- Make the review of evaluation results a regular part of meetings between program partners.
- Establish a governance process by which changes will take place. Determine the Who, What, When, Where, and How for distributing evaluation results and other information; gather suggestions for changes; decide which to fulfill; and then implement them.
- Develop a strategy through which your program keeps all potential supporters and participants informed about the process of change. All people who have a stake in the program will need to be notified of the evaluation results and informed about the process by which changes based on those results will be made.
- Promote a culture in which the purpose of evaluation is creating continuous improvement. Although this may be easier said than done, after-school programs can try to foster a positive attitude toward evaluation by celebrating the opportunity for improvement rather than bemoaning it as another bureaucratic requirement. Strong, positive leadership makes a difference in staff perceptions of evaluation.

- Bring partners together regularly to discuss data in light of "big picture" issues. The daily demands of running an after-school program enforce a "putting out fires" management approach. The process of data collection and analysis offers the opportunity to refocus on both collaboration and the underlying purposes of operating a program.
- Focus on building the skills of staff. Providing instruction in data collection and analysis is an essential component of building program capacity. Foster an atmosphere in which your staff recognizes data collection and analysis as opportunities to increase marketable skills. This atmosphere will diminish the perception that these tasks are simply bureaucratic requirements and will strengthen the perception that these endeavors improve both the program and its employees' qualifications.

Conclusion

A program focused on reaching its goals and cultivating continuous improvement must be focused on evaluation. Evaluation is the tool by which a program can determine two crucial features—what it is doing well, and what it needs to change in order to produce the desired outcomes for its community.

Key Points to Remember

- Data collection is not evaluation. Evaluation seeks to explain what does and does not work, and why, using the information gathered during data collection.
- Indicators should be linked directly to goals.
- Evaluation results should be used to shape the programs, structures, and resource allocation of the after-school program.
- Evaluation should foster continuous improvement.

Evaluation Tools

Tool 18—Developing Indicators for Program Goals
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Tool 20—Participant Satisfaction Survey
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Tool 21—Helpful Resources in Data Collection and Evaluation
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TOOL 18—DEVELOPING INDICATORS FOR PROGRAM GOALS

Directions: You may use this tool to develop indicators for your goals. Once you have agreed on goals, identify a set of indicators for each goal and answer the questions about each one. Then assign activities that lead to the goals' eventual achievement. This order should be observed carefully. Below is a sample, showing how the completed form will look.

SAMPLE FORM

Program Goal*	Possible Indicators	Questions to Ask About Each Indicator				Activities
		Is this indicator relevant?	*Will this indicator provide sufficient information?*	*What data sources are available for this indicator?*	*Is this indicator quantifiable?*	
Improve student achievement in mathematics *Remember to include any goals required of your program. "Goal" in this context is synonymous with "objective," "outcome," or other terms your program may use to refer to changes you expect or desire.	Students' math grades improve			• Report cards • Test scores	Yes	1. Homework Help Session 2. Family Math 3. Chess Club 4. Computer-Based Math Activities 5. Peer Tutoring Group
	Teachers report that students now have homework in on time and correct			• Teacher survey	Yes	
	Students report that they better understand math assignments			• Student surveys	Yes	
	Students enjoy math more than before			• Student report • Teacher observation	Maybe	
	Fewer students in remedial sections of math			• Office records	Yes	

Tool 18—Developing Indicators for Program Goals (continued)

Program Goal	Possible Indicators	Questions to Ask About Each Indicator				Activities
		Is this indicator relevant?	*Will this indicator provide sufficient information?*	*What data sources are available for this indicator?*	*Is this indicator quantifiable?*	

Tool 19—Tips for Creating Good Survey Questions *

- Make the questions short and clear—ideally no more than 20 words per question.
- Avoid questions that have more than one central idea or theme. *NOT this:* "Did the staff provide a high-quality program and work well with your child?" *BUT this:* "Did the staff work well with your child?" *and* "How would you assess the program?"
- Do not use jargon. Your target population must be able to answer the questions you are asking. Tailor the survey to the audience you are reaching (e.g., children or adults, people inside or outside the program, special language or reading needs, and so on).
- Avoid words that are not exact (e.g., generally, usually, average, typically, often, and rarely). If you do use these words, you may get information that is unreliable or not useful.
- Avoid stating questions in the negative. *NOT this:* "What did you not like about the program?" *BUT this:* "Were there areas where the program could be improved?"
- Avoid bias. Slanted questions will produce slanted results.
- Give exact instructions to the respondent on how to record answers. For example, in multiple-choice cases, explain exactly how and where to write the answer (e.g., check a box, circle a number).
- Provide response alternatives. For example, include the response "other" for answers that do not fit elsewhere.
- Make the questionnaire attractive. Plan its format carefully, using subheadings, spaces, and so on. Make the survey look easy for a respondent to complete.
- Try out your survey with a few people before administering it to a large group. Ask your test audience for feedback on the clarity of the questions, the length of time needed to complete the survey, and any specific problems they encountered while completing the survey.
- Have respondents prioritize choices rather than just mark items in which they are interested. "Rank from 1 to 3 the top three programs you would attend, beginning with 1 as your first choice" is preferable to "Check the programs you are interested in attending."
- Try to limit survey length to two pages. An unusually long questionnaire may discourage respondents.

* This list is adapted from the online W. K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook, Chapter 5, the second section, called "Implementation Steps: Designing and Conducting an Evaluation." This entire publication is available free at www.wkkf.org/Publications/evalhdbk/default.htm. For "Acknowledgments" of Kellogg Foundation work on the Evaluation Handbook, replace "default.htm" in the above address with "acknow.htm."

Tool 20—Participant Satisfaction Survey

Participant's Name _____

Activity _____*

Dates of Activity _____*

1. How often did you attend this activity? *(check one)*

❑ All the time ❑ Most of the time ❑ A few times ❑ Two or fewer times

2. Did you enjoy this activity? *(check one)*

❑ Yes, very much ❑ Yes, most of the time ❑ It was OK ❑ No, I did not enjoy it

3. Was the teacher/instructor helpful? *(check one)*

❑ Yes, very ❑ Somewhat helpful ❑ Not helpful ❑ I did not need help

4. Would you tell others to participate in this activity? *(check one)*

❑ Yes, definitely ❑ Probably ❑ Maybe yes, maybe no ❑ I would not

5. Why did you take this activity? *(check all that apply)*

❑ I thought it would be fun.
❑ I thought I would learn something.
❑ My teacher told me to take it.
❑ My friends are taking it.
❑ My parents told me to take it.
❑ I had nothing better to do.

6. What suggestions do you have for improving this activity? Please share any suggestions.

_____

_____

_____

_____

* Your program staff can fill out these administrative items in the heading. Prepare some system so surveys can be specifically referenced to the time, date, activity, or other data. This should enable more detailed feedback and help with filing all your evaluation papers.

Tool 21—Helpful Resources in Data Collection and Evaluation

American Evaluation Association (AEA) Home Page: www.eval.org/

Guiding Principles for Evaluators www.eval.org/EvaluationDocuments/aeaprin6.html

The AEA consists of professional evaluators who seek to improve, increase, and support evaluation. This report compiled by a task force identifies the role and attributes of good evaluators, helping them know their principles and responsibilities.

Links of Interest to Evaluators www.eval.org/ListsLinks/EvaluationLinks/links.htm

This page has many electronic links of interest to evaluators. Scroll down to "General Evaluation Sites" for those that may be most useful in program evaluation.

American Statistical Association (ASA) Home page: www.stat.ncsu.edu/info/srms/srms.html

What Is a Survey? www.stat.ncsu.edu/info/srms/survwhat.html

This Web page explains simply what a survey is, what surveys involve, how surveys may be done, and who may conduct them.

What Are Focus Groups? www.stat.ncsu.edu/info/srms/surveyfocus.pdf

This PDF file examines focus groups. It provides anyone—from beginner to expert—with a good understanding of focus groups.

National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST)

Home Page cresst96.cse.ucla.edu/

This Web page has a library of reports, rubrics, products, and other resources; services such as "Ask the Expert"; a page just for parents; and other contacts and related links.

Center for the Study of Testing, Evaluation, and Educational Policy (CSTEEP)

Evaluation Primer wwwcsteep.bc.edu/CSTEEP/CSTEEPpdf/TestEval.pdf

This PDF report provides an overview of key evaluation issues. It discusses three main approaches to educational program evaluation, offering both theoretical foundation and practical how-to advice.

Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) Home page: gseWeb.harvard.edu/~hfrp/

Indicators: Definition and Use in a Results-Based Accountability System
gseWeb.harvard.edu/~hfrp/releases/rba/tips/indicator.html

This short article outlines a process for selecting and using indicators in evaluation. It includes a resource list.

The Evaluation Exchange: Emerging Strategies in Evaluating Child and Family Services
gseweb.harvard.edu/~hfrp/eval/

This site has links to the current and past issues of this publication—available online, in Web page or PDF format—with articles, interviews, strategies, and news from the field of evaluation.

Tool 21—Helpful Resources in Data Collection and Evaluation (continued)

Learning From Logic Model: An Example of a Family/School Partnership Program
gseWeb.harvard.edu/~hfrp/family-school/html/logic.pdf

This eight-page brief—in PDF format—offers step-by-step guidance in laying out a logic model. A sample model and a resource list are included.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) Home page: www.nwrel.org/

Program Planning & Evaluation www.nwrel.org/eval/evaluation/

This excellent, well-organized Web interface begins with a general overview of program evaluation—the Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why. Then it outlines NWREL's many additional evaluation Web pages, which cover specific areas of all steps in the evaluation process.

Search Institute Home page: www.search-institute.org/

Forty Developmental Assets www.search-institute.org/assets/

This site offers 40 building blocks for healthy adolescent development that may help a program construct goals and benchmarks.

U.S. Department of Education (ED) Home page: www.ed.gov/

A Compact for Learning: An Action Handbook for Family-School-Community Partnerships
www.ed.gov/pubs/Compact/ch4.html

This fourth chapter on evaluation, entitled "Evaluate the Results of the Compact," offers tips and tools on collecting and using data. See the associated activity sheets at ch4a.html and ch4b.html.

21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC): Evaluation www.ed.gov/21stcclc/eval.html

This site offers access to the Word and PDF versions of the Final Annual Performance Report Form and Cover Page that all centers must complete.

A Guide to Continuous Improvement Management (CIM) www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/eval/21cent/cim226.pdf

This PDF file—linked from the Evaluation page cited above—was prepared specifically for learning centers. The text addresses many questions and offers much information. This is an excellent resource.

Continuous Improvement Management Guide for 21st Century Schools
www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/eval/21cent/improve/index.html

This is the first, organizational page for a 1998 ED presentation that you can view online, slide-by-slide, PowerPoint style. It is a good, motivational introduction to the longer guide mentioned above.

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Home page: www.wkkf.org/

Evaluation Handbook www.wkkf.org/Publications/evalhdbk/default.htm

This comprehensive handbook, presented in both Web page and PDF formats, includes—beginning in Part Two—a blueprint for conducting project-level evaluation.

COMMUNICATION

Effective communication allows a program to operate more smoothly and to build recognition and support with community members and other potential supporters.

Effective communication is a critical component of any successful after-school program. It allows a program to operate more smoothly internally and to build recognition and support with community members and other potential supporters. Whether you are focusing on your program staff or school staff, students who use your program, or organizations that may help fund your program, you must decide how much effort you want to expend on developing a communication strategy and what communication methods are most effective.

This chapter will look at these decision points:

- **How do you choose a design for an effective communication strategy?**
- **How do you decide goals for communication?**
- **How do you decide which audience you need to reach?**
- **How do you choose communication methods that reach out to traditionally less-involved groups?**
- **How do you create a message that people will hear?**
- **How do you work with the media?**
- **How do you measure the effectiveness of your communications?**

By collecting and using data about your audiences, your program will be able to make good decisions about each communication: its audience, purpose, and form. The tools at the end of this chapter are designed to help you gather, organize, and use audience data to develop an effective communication strategy. This strategic effort will allow your program to achieve internal coherence and external participation and cooperation to sustain itself. The limited resources of most after-school programs necessitate prioritizing which audiences to target and what modes to use in the beginning stages of operation. Thus, it is a good idea to see a communication strategy as a series of steps.

How Do You Choose a Design for an Effective Communication Strategy?

As with all components of your program operations, you should design your strategy for effective communications within the context of a visioning process that identifies the challenges, needs, and assets of the program. As part of the visioning process, you can take certain steps in designing communications. Consider the following steps:

- Establish goals for communication.
- Identify any groups that are involved in or might be affected by the program.

Getting the Word Out

- Newsletters
- Brochures
- Newspaper articles
- Editorials/op-ed pieces
- T-shirts
- Web sites
- Bulletin boards
- Calendars
- Billboards
- Grocery bag inserts
- Magnets
- Public service announcements
- Video programs
- Cable television
- TV news
- Interviews
- Notes sent home with kids

- Survey each group to determine the most effective ways to communicate with them.
- Format messages—and requests for feedback—according to the characteristics of the targeted group. Keep a record of these characteristics.
- Make a special effort to involve traditionally low-involvement groups.
- Designate a contact person for communications with each group (if appropriate).

In addition, you should continually assess the effectiveness of your communication strategy against established goals, and you should identify someone within the program who is ultimately responsible for all communications. Overall, an effective communication strategy requires a commitment to encourage productive two-way interaction through systematic planning and review.

Use **Tool 22, Communication Strategy Checklist,** to help you design a communications strategy for your program.

How Do You Decide Goals for Communication?

The best way to decide on communication goals for your program is to hold a brainstorming session with your advisory group and staff. Remember to tie your goals to the program's vision and objectives (see Tool 1 in the Management chapter). Look at the needs you identified for your program as you think about what you want to accomplish through your communications. Are you trying to raise money? Increase attendance? Recruit volunteers? Just as lessons work better when a teacher consciously teaches to a set of objectives, so too will communication be more effective when it is focused on established goals. Several examples of how an effective communication strategy can support your program's goals are provided below.

Program Goals	Role of Communication
Goal—Obtain funding in order to sustain the program.	Promote general awareness of the program to: • Increase the number of participants. • Make potential funders aware of the program.
Goal—Increase parent involvement.	• Keep parents informed about the center's activities. • Create a sense of familiarity between parents and center staff. • Describe learning achievements of the participants to demonstrate the value of the program.

Once you have set your goals for communication, you should begin planning for ways to achieve them. Be creative in your thinking. For example, if your communication strategy calls for a parent newsletter, check with local print shops to see if they will donate the cost of printing. Or, find out if your school will allow you to use their copier. You also might want to consider ways that student participants can help. This type of advance planning can save scarce resources and may, in turn, allow you to extend your communication efforts.

How Do You Decide Which Audience You Need to Reach?

It can be argued that the whole community has a stake in the success of your program. However, for the purpose of effective communication, it is important to "segment" your audience (i.e., divide the audience into smaller groups based on pertinent characteristics) so that you can target your communications and increase the likelihood that the audience will respond to the message. See the "Know Your Audience" box for a list of potential audience segments.

Do not feel that you need to create a targeted communication approach for every potential audience from day one. First, consider the primary mission and goals of your program and then base your early communication strategy on these. To determine which audiences to target first, ask yourself the following questions:

- Which audiences most directly influence or are most directly influenced by the program's mission and current goals?
- Which groups may influence other, more "unapproachable" audiences?
- Which audiences are best reached through communication modes we already possess?

Use **Tools 23, Community Communication Survey,** to discover your audiences' communication needs. Use **Tool 24, Community Group Profile/ Communication Record,** to develop a profile of each audience and keep track of your communication outreach efforts. **Tool 25, Communication Log,** can be used in conjunction with Tool 24 to record communication activities in chronological order.

How Do You Choose Communication Methods That Reach Out to Traditionally Less-Involved Groups?

There are many ways to reach out to groups who have not been very involved in your program's activities in the past. Consider some of the following suggestions:

- Ask the group—either informally or through a formal survey—to identify any barriers they face in becoming involved. Then, find ways to help them overcome these barriers.

Know Your Audience

- Student participants
- Student nonparticipants
  - Parents
  - School administrators
  - School faculty
  - Program volunteers
  - Partner agencies
  - Funders
  - School board members
  - Government officials
  - Area colleges and universities
  - Local businesses
  - Faith community
  - Retired citizens
  - Media

Why Communicate?

- To inform/educate
- To persuade
- To promote
- To ask for help or participation
- To demonstrate appreciation
- To elicit feedback
- To gain compliance
- To offer advice or guidance
- To respond to an inquiry

- Use an appropriate format and language in all of your communications with the group.
- Clearly designate one contact person—perhaps a member of the group—to whom the group feels comfortable talking.
- Work closely with an influential person within the group who can encourage others in the group to get involved.
- Create a less-threatening on-site environment (e.g. have an established and visually welcoming space for visitors to gather, train staff to interact effectively with families).
- Hold meetings in a nonschool environment (e.g., community center, church, family home).
- Make an effort to understand the group's *norms* (e.g., the father should be approached first when initiating discussion), *traditions* (e.g., certain hours or days are reserved for certain activities), and *needs* (e.g., translation of materials into the group's native language).
- Take into consideration the group's traditional holidays when planning events.
- Solicit the group's input and use it or explain why it wasn't used.
- Emphasize that the members of the group have something worthwhile to share.
- Praise any group member's efforts to get involved.
- Don't be afraid to ask the group about its preferred means of communication.

Use **Tool 26, Community Group Involvement Checklist,** to assess your program's efforts to encourage more involvement from traditionally less-involved groups.

How Do You Create a Message That People Will Hear?

When communicating with any audience, it is important to remember to do the following:

- Establish a concrete objective for each communication.
- Know the audience so that you can create a content, format, and delivery method to which they are most likely to respond.
- Put yourself in the audience members' place.

Each message you create should be designed to communicate ideas that are clear, concise, persuasive, and memorable. Consider the following tips:

- Be concise.
- Offer no more than three main ideas in each communication.
- Avoid empty words or jargon.

- Use language that creates a visual—and thus longer-lasting—image.
- Make written communication "skim"-able. Use a reader-friendly font, leave plenty of "white" space, and include headings, bullet points, quotations, graphics, and photographs with captions (if applicable).
- When speaking, use simple language, be aware of the tone and timbre of your voice, and articulate your words.

How Do You Work With the Media?

In this Information Age, the question for your program is not "Should we work with the media?" but rather "How can we make the most of local newspapers, radio, or television stations?" By building relationships with the media, you may be able to spread the word about your program, its needs, and its successes without spending a cent. For example, if you are planning a service project to plant bulbs at a senior center, you can invite the local television station. The project offers a terrific learning (and community service) opportunity for your participants and, if the television station covers the activity, can promote positive awareness of the program and its role in the community.

Building relationships with the media takes some effort. It is not enough to send an occasional press release. Instead, you must build the relationships gradually—through personal contact as well as press releases—into ties that are proactive, ongoing, open, and respectful. Though programs in small towns may have an easier time developing these relationships, those in big cities also can create ties with smaller, more localized media outlets rather than trying to get articles in the *New York Times* or its equivalent.

How Do You Measure the Effectiveness of Your Communications?

Answering questions like "Is our message reaching the right audience?" or "Are our communication resources being used well?" can be a challenge. In fact, it can be more difficult to assess the effectiveness of your program's communication efforts than it is to evaluate other program's operations. However, this challenge should not stop you from measuring the success of your communications to the extent possible. Otherwise, you will never know whether you are communicating effectively or if the resources you are using for communication could be better spent elsewhere.

The first step in assessing the effectiveness of your communication is to review your program's goals and objectives. Are your communication efforts helping you achieve these goals? To make your answer to this question more meaningful, it is important to establish specific, measurable benchmarks or indicators for each goal or objective. For example, a program goal might be to increase the number of senior citizen volunteer/mentors by 50 percent. The communication strategy might include posting flyers at local senior centers to raise awareness of the

From the Field: Communications

An after-school program in Sitka, Alaska, needed help getting the word out about their program in order to increase community awareness, support, and attendance. The program worked out a partnership with the local radio station where the station trained kids from the program to use the recording equipment. The kids made their own public service announcement promoting the program.

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program and to describe the benefits of volunteering. You would measure the effectiveness of this approach by the number of senior volunteers who respond to the flyer. If the number of volunteers increases by at least 50 percent, the effort was a success.

Another easy way to assess the effectiveness of your communication is simply to ask your audience what they thought of the message. You can gather feedback through a formal survey, but a simple telephone call or casual conversation ("What did you think about the newsletter we sent you last week?") also can be effective. For a more formal survey approach, use **Tool 27, Satisfaction Survey,** to measure the effectiveness of your communications.

Conclusion

Interviews with a number of successful after-school programs support the idea that communication is essential to an effective and sustainable program. Remember that everything your program does or doesn't do, reports or doesn't report, asks or doesn't ask *is* communicating some type of message. By utilizing a *strategy* for communications, you will increase the chances that the message the public receives is the one you want them to hear.

Key Points to Remember

- A communication strategy is necessary for gaining the internal coherence and external support that a program needs to be sustainable.
- A communication strategy should be assessed continually against established goals and objectives.
- The content and format of each communication should be tailored to address the purpose of the message and the specific needs of the intended audience.
- Traditionally less-involved groups can be encouraged to get involved when you ask for their input and respond to their specific needs.
- A program should build relationships with the media that are proactive, ongoing, open, and respectful.

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COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Tool 22—Communication Strategy Checklist
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Tool 23—Community Communication Survey
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Tool 24—Community Group Profile/ Communication Record
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Tool 25—Communication Log
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Tool 26—Community Group Involvement Checklist
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Tool 27—Satisfaction Survey
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Tool 22—Communication Strategy Checklist

Directions: Use the following list of questions to guide the design of your communication strategy. These questions should be used during the initial planning of the strategy and should be reviewed periodically to ensure that your program's communications continue to meet the needs of your stakeholders.

Questions to Ask About the Communication Strategy

- How will we assess the effectiveness of our communication strategy?
- Have we identified all of our audiences?
- Have we targeted all messages appropriately to each audience?
- Have we identified relationships between audiences that may affect how we communicate with them (e.g., calling on one group to influence another)?
- Do we maintain an ongoing record of communications with each audience?
- Do we regularly review our communication strategy to ensure it is still meeting the needs of our audiences?
- Have we given one person or group ultimate responsibility for communications?

Questions to Ask About Each Audience

- What kinds of information does this group want or need to know about the program?
- How does this group like to receive its information?
- What is this group's association with the program?
- How involved has this group been in the past?
- Does this group have a leader or group of leaders that influences the group's opinions?
- What is the group's familiarity/comfort level with the program?
- What is the level of trust between this group and the program?
- What is the level of support provided by this group to the program?
- From whom is this group most comfortable receiving messages?

Questions to Ask About the Community as a Whole

- What percentage of the community has school-age children in public schools?
- What percentage of the community has school-age children in private/parochial schools?
- What are the primary languages used in the community?
- What are the primary employers in the community?
- What are the largest and/or most active faith communities, civic organizations, etc., in the community?
- What are the major sources of news/information in the community?

Tool 22—Communications Strategy Checklist (continued)

Questions to Ask About Each Outgoing Message

- What do we hope to achieve with this message?
- How will the target group feel upon receiving this message?
- What is the best format for this particular message?
- What language(s) should be used for this message given its audience?
- Does this message have a "hook" that will make the audience more likely to pay attention to it?
- Is this message concise?
- Does this message contain three or fewer main ideas?
- Is this message presented in an appealing, easily understood format?
- Does this message create a visual image that will leave a lasting impression?
- (For written communications) What reading level is required for this message? (Some experts suggest that messages sent to parents should be at the fourth- to sixth-grade reading level.)

Questions to Ask About Each Feedback Opportunity

- Have we requested feedback using different formats that respond to the needs/preferences of each group?
- Have we requested feedback in a variety of locations and at a variety of times to take into account the varying needs/preferences of each group?
- Have we demonstrated that we listen carefully and respectfully to all audiences? How?
- Have we used the input of our audiences? How?
- Have we demonstrated to our audiences that their input influenced program decisions? How?

Tool 23—Community Communication Survey

Directions: Use or adapt this survey to gauge the communication needs and preferences of community members.

Dear Neighbor:

[Name of Program] _____ offers programs for youngsters in [Location] _____. Please complete this brief questionnaire to let us know how we can best communicate with you about our program. We want to keep you informed about our activities and about ways you can get involved. All responses are anonymous. Please return the survey by [Date] _____ to [Name and Address of Contact] _____.

Thank you!

1. Please indicate which group(s) you belong to by checking the appropriate box(es). *(check all that apply)*

- ❑ School staff member
- ❑ After-school program staff/volunteer
- ❑ Parent of a school-age child in public school
- ❑ Parent of a school-age child in a private/parochial school
- ❑ Adult with no school-age children
- ❑ Retired person
- ❑ Other (specify): _____
- ❑ School administrator
- ❑ District administrator
- ❑ School board member
- ❑ Elected official (other than school board member)
- ❑ Faith community leader
- ❑ Civic organization leader
- ❑ Employer

2. What formats do you prefer for receiving general news and information about the program? *(check your top three choices)*

- ❑ Written newsletter
- ❑ Online newsletter
- ❑ E-mail
- ❑ Radio
- ❑ Television
- ❑ Cable television
- ❑ Newspaper
- ❑ Public meeting
- ❑ Other (specify): _____

Tool 23—Community Communication Survey (continued)

3. Where would you prefer to have public meetings concerning the program? *(check one)*

   ❑ At the school

   ❑ At a centrally located site

   ❑ Other (specify): _____

4. What times are best for reaching you on the telephone? *(check your top two choices)*

   ❑ Weekdays, 6 a.m. – 8 a.m.

   ❑ Weekdays, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

   ❑ Weekdays, 5 p.m. – 9 p.m.

   ❑ Weekends

   ❑ I am not easily accessible by telephone.

5. Would you like to become more involved in the after-school program? *(check one)*

   ❑ Yes ❑ No

6. What barriers (if any) have kept you from becoming more involved in the after-school program? *(check all that apply)*

   ❑ Program's hours of operation do not match my schedule

   ❑ Lack of transportation

   ❑ Lack of childcare

   ❑ Don't feel comfortable at the program site

   ❑ Don't know what the program does or what it needs

   ❑ Don't know what skills I would bring to the program

   ❑ Other (specify): _____

   ❑ Don't have the time or resources to become involved

   ❑ Don't have a child in the program

   ❑ Already involved in a similar program elsewhere

7. How can we make it easier for people to get involve?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey! If you have any questions, please contact [Name] _____ at [Telephone Number] _____.

Tool 24—Community Group Profile/Communication Record

Directions: Use the first part of this tool to record information about each community group and the second part to keep track of communications with a group. Under "Population Characteristics," record factors that may influence your communications with this group. "Results" may include attendance levels at meetings, the number of new volunteers, the number of returned surveys, greater adherence to a particular policy, a more cordial relationship with the group, positive feedback from recipients, etc.

You can use this tool by itself or in conjunction with **Tool 25, Communication Log.** Duplicate this tool as needed for each group.

Sample:

Person/Organization:	Parents of Elm Street School Community Center student participants
Contact Information:	See attached list
Population Characteristics:	
Primary language(s):	Spanish, English
Association with program:	Parents of participants
Preferred forms of communication:	Spanish-language radio, bilingual written materials, home visits
Preferred frequency of communication:	Once a week or as needed
Primary objectives for communication:	Build awareness, increase parent involvement
Other considerations:	

Additional Notes:

Tool 24—Community Group Profile/Communication Record (continued)

Sample Communication Record

Date	Content/Format	Objective	Result	Feedback
5/23/00	Radio ad on WACL about upcoming car wash fundraiser	To persuade people to come to the car wash	Bigger turnout than last year	Some parents liked that we used kids in the radio ad; others felt that the other kids felt left out as a result
6/19/00	Flyers (in English and Spanish) sent home with kids about program-sponsored booth at Fourth of July carnival	To let parents know about the carnival and to request parent volunteers for the booth	20 parents volunteered to staff the booth; more families of participants attended than last year	Several parents asked to be involved in planning the booth next year

Tool 24—Community Group Profile/Communication Record (continued)

Person/Organization:	
Contact Information:	
Population Characteristics:	
Primary language(s):	
Association with program:	
Preferred forms of communication:	
Preferred frequency of communication:	
Primary objectives for communication: *Other considerations:*	

Additional Notes:

Tool 24—Community Group Profile/Communication Record (continued)

Date	Content/Format	Objective	Result	Feedback

Tool 25—Communication Log

Directions: Use this tool to keep track of your communication efforts in chronological order. You may use this tool in conjunction with **Tool 24, Community Group Profile/Communication Record,** which records communications with each community group. Or you may use this tool as a stand-alone. Duplicate this tool as needed.

Date	Audience	Content/Format	Objective	Result	Feedback

Tool 26—Community Group Involvement Checklist

Directions: Use this tool with program staff and/or the program's advisory group to help brainstorm ways to promote more involvement. This sheet may be duplicated as needed for each community group.

Community Group: _____

Have we surveyed this community group concerning their program needs?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Have we surveyed this group about barriers that could impede their involvement in the program?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Have we taken concrete steps to try to address these barriers?	❑ Yes	❑ No
If immediate actions to address these barriers are not possible, have we communicated to the group that we have heard its concerns and are working on a solution?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Have we surveyed this group about what language, format, time, and place are best for communications?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Are we using this information in our communications with this group?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Do we actively and consistently solicit feedback from this group?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Have we provided information to this group on how it can get more involved?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Have we provided reasons to this group for why they and the program will benefit from their involvement?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Do we provide training and information to members of this group who get involved in the program?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Do we provide training and information to staff members on how to interact with volunteers from this group?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Do we actively and consistently show appreciation to those who get involved in the program?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Have we taken steps to make the after-school program an inviting place to be?	❑ Yes	❑ No
Have we designated a contact person with whom the members of this group feel comfortable communicating?	❑ Yes	❑ No

TOOL 27—SATISFACTION SURVEY

This survey is intended to gain feedback on how well we are communicating with you about activities and events at [Name of Program] _____. Your responses will remain anonymous, so please answer honestly.

Please return this survey by [Date] _____ to [Name] _____
at [Address, Telephone, Fax] _____.

1. How would you rate the program's efforts to keep you informed and involved? *(check one)*

   ❑ Excellent—I feel informed about all activities and events and I am aware of all the ways I can get involved.

   ❑ Good—I feel generally informed about the program and its involvement opportunities.

   ❑ Fair—I occasionally receive information about the program and its involvement opportunities, but feel somewhat "out of the loop" at times.

   ❑ Unsatisfactory—The program does very little to keep me informed or involved.

2. How would you rate the program's efforts to request your input about their activities? *(check one)*

   ❑ Excellent—The program regularly asks for feedback from the whole community. The program also reports to the community how it has used this input or reports why it was unable to do so.

   ❑ Good—The program asks for feedback and tries to address the issues raised by those they survey. However, the program should ask for feedback more often and/or survey other groups.

   ❑ Fair—The program asks for feedback, but not often or in a very structured way. Not much seems to change as a result of the feedback it receives.

   ❑ Unsatisfactory—The program does not ask for feedback from the community.

3. How would you rate the frequency of the program's communications about its activities and events? *(check one)*

   ❑ Just right ❑ Too little ❑ Too much

4. Please provide any comments or suggestions regarding the frequency of the program's communications regarding activities and events.

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. Which methods of communication would you like the program to use more often when providing information about activities and events? *(check two or check "no change is needed")*

   ❑ Written newsletter ❑ Radio

   ❑ Online newsletter ❑ Newspaper

   ❑ E-mail ❑ Other (specify): _____

   ❑ Television ❑ No change is needed

   ❑ Telephone

Tool 27—Satisfaction Survey (continued)

6. How would you rate the frequency of the program's requests for feedback? *(check one)*

   ❑ Just right ❑ Too little ❑ Too much

7. Please provide any comments or suggestions regarding the frequency of the program's requests for feedback.

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

8. What methods would you like the program to use for requesting feedback? *(check two or check "no change is needed")*

   ❑ Written surveys

   ❑ Online surveys

   ❑ Telephone surveys

   ❑ Focus groups held at the center

   ❑ Focus groups held at another location

   ❑ Other (specify): _____

   ❑ No change is needed

9. Has the program made an effort to make all visitors feel welcome? *(check one)*

   ❑ Yes ❑ No

10. What suggestions do you have for making the program more welcoming?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

11. What comments or suggestions do you have for improving the program's communications overall?

    _____

    _____

    _____

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey! If you any questions, please contact [Name] _____ at [Telephone Number] _____.

RESOURCES

PUBLICATIONS

Hard copies of most U.S. Department of Education guides are available by calling 877-4ED-PUBS or by ordering online at http://www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html. Single copies usually are free.

After-School Program Handbook: Strategies and Effective Practices. Center for Urban and Regional Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Bringing Education Into the Afterschool Hours. U.S. Department of Education. Available online at http://www.ed.gov/pubs/After_School_Programs/. This publication offers information and resources on incorporating reading, math, college preparation, teacher Recruitment and training, technology, the arts, safe and drug free programs, and parent involvement into after-school programs.

Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey by Michael Winer and Karen Ray, 1994. Amherst H. Wilder Foundation. Order by phone at 800-274-6024 or e-mail at books@wilder.org. For more information, see the Web site at www.wilder.org. Though this book is not specifically about partnerships within education, it does provide step-by-step guidance in forming collaborative relationships between organizations as well as tools and resources.

Evaluation Handbook. W. K. Kellogg Foundation. This publication is available at www.wkkf.org/Publications/evalhdbk/default.htm.

Give Us Wings, Let Us Fly. U.S. Department of Education. Available online at http://www.pfie.ed.gov/ or http://www.ed.gov/21stcclc/.

Keeping Schools Open as Community Learning Centers: Extending Learning in a Safe, Drug-Free Environment Before and After School. U.S. Department of Education. Available at www.pfie.ed.gov/ or http://www.ed.gov/21stcclc/. This document offers tips on how to run before- and after-school programs, with advice and tools for planning, financing, budgeting, and evaluating. It also includes portraits of programs across the country and a list of resources.

Safe and Smart II: Making the After-School Hours Work for Kids. U.S. Departments of Education and Justice. Available online at http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ or http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/SafeSmart/. This document provides research detailing the importance of after-school programs, notes characteristics of high-quality after-school centers, offers profiles of successful programs around the country, and furnishes a large number of available resources.

Strengthening Connections Between Schools and After-School Programs. North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. For more information, see their Web site at http://www.ncrel.org or call 800-356-2735. This document provides indicators as well as sample policies and programs for 16 characteristics of program integration. These characteristics include climate for inclusion, facilities management, funding, leadership and governance, and public relations, among others.

Transforming Schools Into Community Learning Centers, by Steve Parson. Eyes on Education. For more information, see www.eyeoneducation.com or call 914-833-0551. This book offers one perspective on the "why" and "how" behind many components (including shared leadership, collaboration, and technology) of a community learning center.

Web Sites

Afterschool.gov, http://www.afterschool.gov/—Offers links and referrals to a wide variety of after-school resources including a database of more than 100 grant and loan programs from the federal government.

Benton Foundation's Connect for Kids, http://www.connectforkids.org/—Provides information and ideas to help parents get involved in improving the community for their children.

Center for Community Partnerships, www.upenn.edu/ccp—Provides information on University of Pennsylvania community service programs, community service courses, and publications.

Coalition for Community Schools, http://www.communityschools.org/—Provides tools to help community schools deal with the challenges they face. Offers the opportunity to participate in an online discussion forum and to become a part of their e-mail newsletter.

C.S. Mott Foundation, www.mott.org/21stcentury/—Includes an overview of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, announcements and polls, grant listings, and an online discussion group.

Federal Resources for Educational Excellence, www.ed.gov/free—Resources for teaching and learning from 30 federal agencies, with search tools and a bulletin board for teachers and federal agencies to communicate about potential collaboration on new teaching and learning resources.

The Finance Project, www.financeproject.org—Part of a series of technical assistance resources on financing and sustaining out-of-school time and community initiatives.

The Gateway, www.thegateway.org (ERIC Clearinghouse on Information and Technology, U.S. Department of Education, National Library of Education)—Provides access to Internet lesson plans, curriculum units, and other education resources.

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (formerly the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory), www.mcrel.org/programs/21stcentury—Includes basic information on the 21st CCLC program, studies and reports on after-school models and case studies, references to programs providing assistance for after-school operations, an e-mail discussion forum, and an opportunity to submit questions to McREL staff.

National Center for Community Education, www.nccenet.org—Provides information on news and events, models and case studies, a networking database, resources, and links to funding opportunities.

National Community Education Association, www.ncea.org—Includes information on publications and conferences related to the topic of after school.

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National Institute on Out-of-School Time, www.Wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW.SAC—Provides information on announcements, upcoming events, training services, publications and data, and resource links, as well as information about the NIOST initiative and a proposed partnership to establish standards and accreditation of school-age child care programs.

National Network for Child Care, http://www.nncc.org/—Includes an extensive database of publications and an e-mail discussion supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension Service.

National School-Age Care Alliance, www.nsaca.org—Provides information on quality school-age care and after-school programs.

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, http://www.ncrel.org/21stcclc—Provides information and resources for operating 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, www.pfie.ed.gov—Includes a comprehensive listing of U.S. Department of Education publications on family and community involvement, including after-school programs, as well as other resources.

The Rural School and Community Trust, www.ruraledu.org—Offers links to papers on policy initiatives and emerging issues; a list of publications on place-based education and the efforts of the Rural Trust to link communities and schools in a rural education reform movement; and links to resources.

School Age Child Care List, http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/eece/listserv/sac-1.html—A discussion list for anyone interested in school-age care planning, resources, activities, funding, staff and staff development, and related subjects.

School-Age Notes, www.schoolagenotes.com—After-school catalog of resources for before- and after-school summer programs for ages 5-14.

Search Institute, www.search-institute.org—Information on an array of topics related to youth development.

U.S. Department of Education, http://www.ed.gov/21stcclc/—Offers information and materials on an array of topics related to 21st Century Community Learning Center programs.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, www.hhs.gov—Offers information on resources available for after-school programs from HHS.

U.S. Department of Justice, Justice for Kids & Youth, www.usdoj.gov/kidspage—Furnishes information on children and youth on crime prevention, staying safe, Internet safety, current events, human relations, and the criminal justice system.

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